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# **British Nuclear Policymaking**

Christopher J. Bowie, Alan Platt

January 1984

**Rand**

**PROJECT AIR FORCE**

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prepared for the  
United States Air Force



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## PREFACE

The Rand Corporation is examining, under Project AIR FORCE, potential military and political issues associated with possible future changes in U.S. doctrine and force structure for the employment of nuclear weapons in the European theater. The military studies cover a range of topics, from "exploiting improved target acquisition" to "the future of dual-capable aircraft." The political studies examine potential European reactions to future U.S. initiatives in the doctrine and force structure area with the aim of helping U.S. defense planners assess how best to design and present initiatives.

This study analyzes the nuclear policymaking process in Britain by examining the role of such a major actor as the executive branch, as well as the roles of several other political forces that affect nuclear policymaking in Britain—the parties, the unions, the media, and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

This report was completed in August 1983, following the reelection of the Thatcher government and the promulgation of the 1983 Defence White Paper. However, it precedes the proposed deployment by NATO of ground-launched cruise missiles in Britain, scheduled to begin in December 1983.

This study should be of interest to American decisionmakers and analysts interested in NATO and Western European affairs. It also merits the attention of non-American and nongovernmental analysts and observers who follow British nuclear policy issues.

## SUMMARY

This study analyzes the domestic political, economic, and bureaucratic factors that affect the nuclear policymaking process in Great Britain. Its major conclusion is that, although there have been changes in that process in recent years (notably the current involvement of a segment of the British public in the debate about the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear forces), future British nuclear policymaking will remain much what it has been in the past.

Three ideas are central to understanding British thinking and attitudes on the subject.

**First, Britain's long-standing resolve to have her own national nuclear force is largely traceable to her desire to maintain first-rank standing among the nations of the world in spite of her loss of empire.** This desire has frequently led Britain to take initiatives that have not been closely coordinated with other NATO countries.

**Second, financial considerations have always been important—so much so that they have usually dominated issues of nuclear policy.** The current controversy over the acquisition of Trident II, for example, has more to do with budgetary allocations than it does with nuclear doctrine or policy—at least in official circles. Strategic policy considerations dominate only those few nuclear issues (e.g., targeting policy) that are primarily doctrinal and do not entail the expenditure of large sums of new monies.

**Third, the executive branch of government dominates the nuclear policymaking process, for several reasons:**

- British governmental deliberations, particularly those relating to national security, are so cloaked in secrecy that political actors outside the executive do not have enough detailed information with which to influence government policy.
- Parliament typically does not try to intervene in the formulation of nuclear policy. The Conservative and Labour Parties tend to observe strict party discipline and to follow tradition. For these and other reasons, the majority party is unlikely to oppose governmental nuclear policy—an action that could, after all, cause the government to fall and endanger the dissenters' political futures.

- The executive branch dominates British nuclear policymaking because of the influence of the civil service, which is drawn from the best products of the British university system and is much more powerful in Britain than in most other Western democracies. Senior civil servants outnumber political appointees in the government by a ratio of 40 to 1; their numbers and their years of experience enable them to dominate the shape and direction of virtually all government initiatives.

**The executive branch does not always present a united front, however.** Differences of opinion over nuclear policy have sometimes emerged within the four executive agencies most immediately involved: the Cabinet Office, a coterie of civil servants who advise the Prime Minister; the Ministry of Defence; the Treasury, whose role is often decisive in these troubled economic times; and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is concerned with how Britain's nuclear policy affects relations with the United States and the European allies.

The general political climate also affects the formulation of policy, and that climate consists largely of the actions of political parties. The uneasy consensus on nuclear policy between the Conservative and Labour Parties, which has persisted for most of the postwar period, has recently broken down:

- The Conservatives are committed to replacement of the Polaris fleet and deployment of cruise missiles in Britain;
- Labour has opted, at least for now, for a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament;
- The new Liberal/Social Democrat Party alliance has tried to adopt a middle-of-the-road approach, opposing the acquisition of Trident II but remaining ambiguous on other nuclear policy issues.

Three other actors enjoy limited policy influence: the trade unions and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, both of which typically work through the Labour Party, and the media, which, however, have traditionally acted more as a transmitter than a challenger of government policy.

**Finally, the United States heavily influences British nuclear policy through having supplied Britain since the late 1950s with nuclear data and components of nuclear weapon systems such as Polaris and, as currently planned, Trident.** The result has been to tie Britain to the vagaries of American defense policies and to help shape the development of Britain's strategic forces.

**The relationship works both ways. The United States depends on Britain as a base for the deployment of both conventional and nuclear systems.**

Continuity remains the hallmark of British nuclear policy. Britain is more likely to accept proposed changes in NATO nuclear employment doctrine and force posture if the changes are thoroughly discussed by the responsible civil servants, do not threaten Britain's sense of independence, and do not entail large new British expenditures.

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## I. THE EVOLUTION OF THE BRITISH NUCLEAR DETERRENT

The United Kingdom, traditionally America's most supportive European ally, plays a vital role in NATO security policy. Britain fields a flexible array of highly professional conventional forces largely committed to the defense of Europe and has agreed to the basing on her soil of American communications stations, Polaris/Poseidon support facilities, dual-capable aircraft, nuclear weapons, and most recently ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs). Further, the United Kingdom and France are the only military members of the Alliance besides the United States that unilaterally control both theater and strategic nuclear forces.

As the United States attempts to strengthen consensus on NATO's nuclear employment doctrine and associated forces, British thinking about nuclear policy issues will be increasingly important to the United States. The United Kingdom's political and military position within NATO makes it vital that any new American proposals attempt to accommodate British thoughts and desires on the course of Western strategy, whether these concern Britain's national nuclear deterrent forces, the stationing of U.S. nuclear forces on British soil, Britain's conventional contributions to NATO forces, or the future course of Britain's defense relationship with the United States and other NATO countries. British officials see themselves as interpreters of the Americans to the continent and of the continent to the Americans. Neither American nor continental, British officialdom views itself as uniquely qualified to interpret each to the other. Nevertheless, very little has been written in the last decade, particularly by non-Britons, about the British nuclear policymaking process.

This study is a step toward filling that gap. In shedding some light on how and why Britain's views on nuclear issues may or may not diverge from those of the United States, the study has three concrete objectives. First, it tries to put current and prospective British thinking about nuclear issues into some historical perspective. Second, it describes and analyzes the roles of key political actors in the nuclear policy area—the executive branch, the political parties, the media, the trade unions, and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Third, and most important, the analysis is intended to increase American understanding of the nuclear policymaking process in Britain, so that the

United States will be in a better position to shape future NATO strategy, taking into account British concerns and interests.

The United Kingdom at present spends both a larger amount of money and a higher proportion of her GNP (roughly 5.2 percent) on defense than any other NATO member besides the United States. Britain has also seriously tried to increase defense spending 3 percent per year in real terms, as agreed to in NATO's 1978 Long Term Defense Plan, and has consistently led all NATO nations in the percent of total defense spending devoted to capital spending.<sup>1</sup> This has all taken place although Britain's economy has been seriously troubled by inflation, low productivity, and record unemployment.

Britain currently spends about \$24 billion dollars<sup>2</sup> annually on defense. On this somewhat modest defense budget, Britain is able to maintain an impressive array of forces rivaled in many respects by only the United States, the Soviet Union, and France. Britain's armed forces consist of a professional elite army (176,000 men), a well-trained air force comparable in size to Israel's (93,000 men), and a "blue water" navy with worldwide basing (75,000 men). Finally, as the recent war over the Falklands so dramatically demonstrated, the British government maintains a rapid deployment force of some 8,000 Royal Marines, 400 Special Air Service troops, and 400 Special Boat Service men.<sup>3</sup>

Britain's nuclear forces resemble those of the superpowers in type, if not in size. They consist of short-range theater nuclear forces (one regiment of Lance missiles and three regiments of 8-inch artillery based in Germany and equipped with U.S. warheads under agreed U.S./UK control procedures); medium-range theater forces (four squadrons of Jaguars, five squadrons of Buccaneers, two squadrons of Tornado multi-role combat aircraft,<sup>4</sup> and two squadrons of carrier-borne Harriers, all equipped with UK-controlled free fall nuclear weapons); anti-submarine systems (UK-controlled depth charges carried on helicopters and Nimrod patrol aircraft); and finally, strategic nuclear

<sup>1</sup>Spending on RDT&E, procurement of major equipment and ammunition, and construction of facilities including NATO infrastructure. See Caspar Weinberger, *Report on Allied Contributions to the Common Defense*, to the United States Congress, March 1982, pp. 21-54.

<sup>2</sup>*Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1983*, Cmnd. 8951-I, London, July 1983.

<sup>3</sup>In the December 1982 Defence White Paper released after the Falklands campaign, the British indicated their plans to bolster their rapid deployment force by keeping two assault ships previously destined for scrapping in commission and by increasing the capability of the 5th Infantry Brigade to carry out independent airborne operations.

<sup>4</sup>Seven additional squadrons of Tornados are currently programmed to replace the Buccaneers.

forces (four UK-controlled Polaris submarines with a total of 64 missiles).<sup>5</sup>

The character and mixed array of British nuclear and conventional forces are traceable to Britain's gradual contraction from the role of a world power following World War II to her present role as a medium power. Following so-called "Defence Reviews" in 1957, 1966, and 1975, Britain progressively reduced its global commitments to concentrate on a more localized role in the defense of Western Europe. Allocations in the reduced annual defense budgets were spread fairly evenly among the three services, resulting in the present flexible and balanced force posture resembling that of a "mini-superpower."

In more recent years, the British government has made a series of politically contentious decisions that will affect British defense policy for decades to come. After 14 months in office, Margaret Thatcher's administration announced its decision in July 1980 to procure, at a cost of some £5 billion, a force of four submarines equipped with Trident I missiles purchased from the United States to replace the aging Polaris system. Eleven months later, the government released the controversial 1981 Defence Review entitled *The Way Forward*, which proposed fiscally necessary cuts in the Royal Navy and its support establishment while preserving and re-equipping the Royal Air Force and British Army.<sup>6</sup> Concurrently, however, the Reagan administration's decision to accelerate the procurement of the Trident II system forced the British government to reconsider its choice of strategic systems. A major British concern in the initial Trident I decision was to maintain commonality with the American procurement process; and in this light, the British announced their decision in January 1982 to purchase the Trident II system at an estimated cost of some £7.5 billion, or \$15 billion.<sup>7</sup>

Less than three months after the Trident II decision, however, the Falklands War erupted to cast some doubt on the wisdom of cutting back Britain's maritime power—indeed, some observers have argued that had the Argentinians waited six more months before invading, Britain would not have had the naval forces needed to recapture the territory. Six months after the conclusion of hostilities in the South

<sup>5</sup>See *Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1981*, Cmnd. 8212-I, London, April 1981; and *Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1983*, Cmnd. 8951-I, London, July 1983.

<sup>6</sup>See *The Way Forward*, Cmnd. 8288, London, June 1981.

<sup>7</sup>If spent in a lump sum, the cost of this system would equal two thirds of the British defense budget. Further, some analysts believe that the British government has underestimated the cost of buying Trident II. For example, the Director of the Center for Defense Studies at Aberdeen University estimates that the Trident package will cost about £10 billion, or 25 percent more than the official estimate. See David Greenwood, *The "Trident Program," Aberdeen Studies in Defense Economics*, No. 22.

Atlantic, the British government released an updated Defence White Paper, which laid out new plans to spend some \$3 billion to replace the naval and air losses incurred during the conflict. Further, the government stated its plans to retain three, rather than two, carriers in service, to build five modern escort vessels, and seemingly pulled back from its commitment to prune the Royal Navy substantially. In the 1983 Defence Estimates, however, the Thatcher administration reaffirmed its plans to continue reducing the size of Britain's surface naval fleet, although the size of these cuts is still somewhat uncertain.<sup>8</sup>

The decisions concerning first Trident I and now Trident II, coupled with the 1979 decision to deploy GLCMs at two British sites and the recent Falklands campaign, have generated a good deal of controversy about British nuclear policy within the United Kingdom and in a number of other NATO countries. Some have raised the matter of whether Britain can afford to procure Trident II at this time. Others have claimed that the procurement of Trident II will seriously limit Britain's conventional force contribution to NATO in the future. Still others have argued that Britain's acquisition of the Trident II missile will hopelessly complicate ongoing U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms negotiations, and their arguments have been strengthened by the recent Soviet offer to link its SS-20 deployments to British and French nuclear forces.

Given the controversial nature of the Trident II decision, the Thatcher government has come forward with several pronouncements about the reasons for acquiring this formidable but expensive system. In these pronouncements—as in the statements justifying the purchase of Trident I missiles in 1980—the British government has defended its decision on the grounds that the Trident system will enhance deterrence. According to former Defence Secretary John Nott:

The crucial role which our nuclear forces play in enhancing Alliance security lies in providing a nuclear deterrent capability committed to the Alliance yet fully under the control of a European member. Even if in some future situation Soviet leaders imagined that the United States might not be prepared to use nuclear weapons, having to take account of enormous destructive power in European hands would compel them to regard the risks of aggression in Europe as still very grave. This additional element of insurance—"the second centre of decision"—has been a feature of Alliance deterrence for over twenty-five years.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>*Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1983*, Cmnd. 8951-I, London, 1983, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>*Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1981*, Cmnd. 8212-I.

Put simply, the official strategic rationale for Britain's independently controlled nuclear forces is to increase Soviet uncertainty in gauging any NATO military response to aggression. In response to claims that the acquisition of Trident will inevitably weaken Britain's conventional force contribution to NATO, Nott has asked rhetorically "whether a future Soviet leadership would be more likely to be deterred by 'an invulnerable second strike submarine-launched ballistic missile force' or by 'two extra armoured divisions with 300 additional tanks.'"<sup>10</sup>

This rationale is also driven by international considerations. British nuclear forces are under national command during peacetime, but they are under SACEUR (the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe) in time of emergency, although the British reserve the right to withhold use of their nuclear arsenal. Most official statements on the role of the British deterrent are couched in reference to the Alliance. A far more basic purpose of Britain's nuclear forces, however, is to deter a Soviet nuclear strike on Britain. As the British Defence Secretary stated in an unguarded moment: "I'm not buying it [Trident II] for NATO. In the last resort we must be able to stand alone. I'm greatly in favour of the Alliance, but you never can tell, and I can't be sure that the Alliance will be as healthy in 20 years time as it is today."<sup>11</sup>

Although forcefully emphasizing the critical importance of the Trident system for Britain's defense, the British government has concentrated on the technical and financial issues behind the procurement decision. But it has been vague and unresponsive concerning the precise details underpinning the strategic rationale for Trident. To be sure, the government has reiterated Britain's political interest in maintaining an effective independent strategic nuclear deterrent force and a second center of decisionmaking within NATO into the next century. It has also explained in some detail the technical, financial, and political advantages in retaining commonality with American strategic nuclear forces by procuring Trident II, and it has explained that the Trident II missiles and accompanying submarines are the most cost-effective way for Britain to maintain an independent and credible nuclear force.

Other strategic questions remain unanswered. What strategic roles are envisioned for Trident II? For the other components of the British nuclear deterrent? How does Britain's decision to procure Trident II relate to NATO's defense doctrine and plans? Will it make NATO's

<sup>10</sup>*The United Kingdom Trident Programme*, Defence Open Government Document 82/1, March 1982, p. i.

<sup>11</sup>*The Guardian*, 13 September 1982.

flexible response strategy less credible? In what ways and how might this problem be attenuated? Is Britain's independently controlled nuclear deterrent compatible with improving NATO command and control capabilities? And how will the acquisition of Trident II, with its greatly increased accuracy and number of warheads, affect Britain's future thinking about nuclear employment doctrine and force requirements in the theater? These questions touch on many of the strategic and targeting issues associated with the Trident decision that the British government has not addressed, and is not likely to address, either publicly or in closed-door meetings with Members of Parliament. When a Liberal MP recently tried to draw out Thatcher about the kinds of circumstances that would lead the government to consider the independent use of its strategic nuclear forces, he drew this unenlightening reply:

We have never been alone before. I trust we will never be alone again. It is reasonable and prudent to make proper provision for the defence of this country if we were. Only then could we stand up to any potential aggressor.<sup>12</sup>

And, on another occasion, when the government refused to discuss the detailed strategic rationale for the Trident decision with the Commons, and the opposition charged that the Trident decision was a not-well-thought-out "emotional spasm," Nott replied: "If it is an emotional spasm it has been a disease of eight successive Governments."<sup>13</sup>

The current government's rhetoric and pregnant silence on the detailed strategic thinking behind the decision to procure Trident is not totally surprising. Indeed, the antecedents for this pattern of British activity—silence, obfuscation, and formulation of nuclear policy without close coordination with NATO doctrine and policy—clearly lie in the evolution of British nuclear policy and in the traditionally secretive style of British government.

The decision to develop an independent British nuclear capability emerged right after World War II when the British government expected that it should and would play a powerful role in world affairs. The nation was one of the "Big Three," possessing a large army, the world's second largest navy, and a technologically advanced air force. Further, Britain had participated in the Manhattan Project and her scientists had gained the knowledge required to build atomic bombs. Finally, the United States had agreed to extend the intimate wartime cooperation of the nuclear program into the postwar period, therefore

<sup>12</sup>*The Guardian*, 3 April 1982.

<sup>13</sup>*The Times*, 18 March 1982.

giving Britain the heady possibility of belonging to the exclusive "nuclear club."

Britain's potentially commanding position alongside the United States, however, proved to be more shadow than substance. Her preeminent trading position in the Far East had been destroyed by Japan's military conquest and burgeoning nationalism. The latter factor undermined Britain's position in India and promised to do the same to her power in the Middle East and Africa. American support was required to counterbalance Soviet influence in Western Europe, Iran, Turkey, and Greece.

Britain's exhausted economy loomed as an ominous and seemingly intractable problem, and there were few initial indications that the United States would help to rebuild British and Western European industrial power. Finally, the American Congress passed the McMahon Act of August 1946, which forbade the transmission of information on nuclear energy to other nations.

With this unilateral American action in mind, a small defense subcommittee of the British cabinet met in 1946-1947 to consider the nuclear program. It decided that Britain should go ahead with its own nuclear program for three reasons. First, the subcommittee believed that perceptions of global political influence were intimately related to the possession of nuclear weapons. When advising the British government on the possibilities of building a bomb in the early days of World War II, a scientific advisory committee had noted: "Even if the war should end before the bombs are ready the effort would not be wasted since no nation would care to risk being caught without a weapon of such decisive possibilities."<sup>14</sup> This observation has become a basic principle of British defense policy and has frequently been echoed in subsequent government statements on the need for a British deterrent. The simple truth is that when the Empire crumbled and the economy failed to recover, nuclear weapons became—and continue to be—an important element in Britain's struggle to maintain its previous standing among the nations of the world. The current panoply of British nuclear forces owes its very existence in large part to Britain's previous role as a world power, a role the nation has been unable to fulfill, but one that continues to exert a powerful psychological influence on Britain's foreign and defense policies.

The second reason for Britain's decision to acquire its own nuclear weapons related to Britain's global interests. Britain felt it needed nuclear weapons to make a Soviet attack on Western Europe less

<sup>14</sup>A.J.R. Groom, *British Thinking About Nuclear Weapons*, Pinter, London, 1974, p. 555.



likely, particularly if its conventional forces were deployed around the world to police the Empire.

British leaders also feared possible American isolationism. They were well aware of the traditional disinclination of American leaders to have security commitments around the world, and the United States had so far failed to commit itself to the defense of Western Europe. In the wake of American postwar demobilization, British leaders feared that Britain might be left to fend for itself in an increasingly hostile and uncertain international environment. A British nuclear force was seen as "a hedge against political failure [by the United States]. It was that measure of 'self defense' which would bring 'mutual aid.'" <sup>15</sup> Put another way, British acquisition of nuclear weapons would put a British finger on the American nuclear trigger.

None of these lines of reasoning provides a detailed strategic rationale behind Britain's initial decision to acquire nuclear weapons. Moreover, all the evidence—histories, diaries, interviews, periodicals—points to the primacy of political considerations, with *post hoc* military rationales adduced to justify essentially political decisions. As former Prime Minister Attlee explained the decision to proceed with the independent nuclear program:

We couldn't get co-operation with the Americans. That stupid MacMahon Act prevented our acting fully with them. And they were inclined to think they were the big boys and we were the small boys; we just had to show them they didn't know everything. <sup>16</sup>

The initial decision to acquire nuclear weapons also illustrates the dominant pattern in Britain's nuclear policymaking process: It was a unilateral decision, taken mainly for national political reasons without close military coordination with the United States or other Western European allies. And the implications of the decision were never fully explained publicly or in meetings with Members of Parliament.

The international situation soon intervened to alter British security policy. Following the Soviet Union's aggressive actions in Europe, which culminated in the Berlin Blockade of 1948, Britain spearheaded a movement to gain an American military and political commitment to defend Western Europe. With the successful formation of NATO in the spring of 1949, however, Britain's defense policy shifted because of the outbreak of hostilities in Korea.

<sup>15</sup>R. Rosecrance, *Defense of the Realm: British Strategy in the Nuclear Epoch*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1968, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>William Snyder, *The Politics of British Defense Policy, 1945-1962*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1964, p. 231.

The United States strongly indicated its desire for assistance, and the British government pragmatically judged that a failure to support the United States in Korea could lead to a declining American commitment to the defense of Western Europe. Further, the British feared that the United States might become too bogged down in the Far East to devote adequate attention to Europe. Accordingly, the British sent a large force to fight in Korea and also began a major conventional force buildup. The primary reason for the buildup, however, was to demonstrate to the United States that it could count on Europe for military and political support.

This Korean War-induced conventional force buildup, combined with a severe financial crisis, led the British government in the early 1950s to focus its attention on the revolution in strategy caused by the advent of atomic weapons and also on the competing economic demands of its conventional and nuclear forces. In 1950, in NATO, "Strategic power merely supplemented ground forces; at the end of 1952, it was clear that ground strength merely supplemented strategic attack."<sup>17</sup> The British government instructed the Chiefs of Staff to examine Britain's defense problems, taking into account the role of nuclear weapons, the costs of conventional arms, and the weakened economy.

In the spring of 1952, the service heads produced a Global Strategy Paper, which exerted a powerful influence on subsequent British nuclear policy. The Chiefs of Staff argued for the indefinite maintenance of an independent British nuclear capability. In political terms, a continuing British nuclear force would increase UK influence in the Cold War, especially over the United States, whose support was vital for the defense of Europe and the British homeland. In economic terms, it allowed Britain to attain "more bang for the buck," particularly as the United Kingdom tried to offset growing Soviet conventional strength in Europe and protect its far-flung global defense commitments. And in military terms, it would enhance deterrence with regard to Western Europe, for the Soviets would be aware that any aggression in Europe would be met with "an instantaneous and overwhelming atomic air attack."

The secret 1952 Global Strategy Paper and the government's firm decision to proceed with separate British nuclear development shaped subsequent British nuclear policy. Among other things, they led to the decision to build the hydrogen bomb, formally taken by the Conservative government in 1952. They also ultimately led the government in

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<sup>17</sup>Rosecrance, *Defense of the Realm*, p. 159.

1957 to support a policy of massive retaliation regarding the Soviets, the United Kingdom becoming "the first nation to base its national security planning almost entirely upon a declaratory policy of nuclear deterrence."<sup>18</sup> It should be underscored that Britain developed this policy independently, without consulting other NATO members, although a key motivation, as in the United States, was a desire to limit military spending without jeopardizing perceived global security interests. For Britain, nuclear weapons were seen as a cheaper means of deterring aggression in Europe while keeping an Empire and Commonwealth.

The role of nuclear weapons as the cornerstone of British defense policy in Europe became more and more apparent in subsequent Defence White Papers and reached its logical conclusion in the 1957 White Paper submitted to Parliament by Duncan Sandys, the head of the Ministry of Defence. The "Sandys Doctrine" stated that British power ultimately rested upon a secure economic base and, accordingly, it would be necessary to reduce military spending even further. "Atomic rocket artillery" would make up for the planned reduction in the British army and air force units based in Germany, as well as the ending of unpopular conscription. As Sandys explained:

Limited and localised acts of aggression . . . by a satellite Communist state could, no doubt, be resisted with conventional arms, or, at worst, tactical atomic weapons. . . . If, on the other hand, the Russians were to launch a full-scale offensive against Western Europe . . . it is inconceivable that either the Soviet Union or the free world would allow itself to be defeated . . . without throwing everything it had into the battle, including nuclear weapons.<sup>19</sup>

The credibility of such a deterrent posture of "massive retaliation" was increasingly questioned by commentators in Britain, the continent, and the United States in light of the growing Soviet nuclear capability. First, Soviet threats to "atomize" Britain during the 1956 Suez crisis dramatically illustrated just how vulnerable the highly congested and urbanized British Isles were to nuclear attack. Further, the Soviet Union had recently taken a number of steps to counterbalance NATO nuclear forces based in Western Europe; and the 1957 launch of Sputnik was soon to undermine not only the American nuclear guarantee, but the credibility of Britain's vulnerable bomber-based deterrent. As *The Times* remarked: "A threat to commit suicide is not a rational defense policy."

<sup>18</sup>Andrew Pierre, *Nuclear Politics: The British Experience with an Independent Strategic Force, 1939-1970*, Oxford University Press, London, 1972, p. 87.

<sup>19</sup>For an excellent discussion of the 1957 White Paper, see Groom, *British Thinking about Nuclear Weapons*, pp. 205-252.

The issue of using the British force as a catalyst to trigger the American nuclear guarantee was raised in several British journal articles but was never officially addressed. As the age of mutual assured destruction appeared to become a reality in the late 1950s, criticism of Britain's policy inside and outside the United Kingdom grew more voluble. The government, however, remained unmoved and continued to assert that "massive retaliation" was the basis of British defense policy in Europe. Again, this was an independently formulated policy driven by the need to reduce military spending while maintaining Britain's global interests.

By 1960, Britain's strategic bomber force was fully operational, but seemingly obsolete. However, in this same year its proposed successor—the Blue Streak land-based ballistic missile—was canceled because of its escalating cost and vulnerability to a preemptive strike. To replace Blue Streak, the British government pursued its long-standing "special relationship" with the United States to buy the air-launched Skybolt missile system to extend the life of its bomber fleet. Soon after the Cuban missile crisis, however, the American government decided to cancel the program after minimal consultation with British leaders. In an atmosphere of crisis, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan met with President Kennedy in late 1962 and quickly hammered out an agreement whereby the United States agreed to sell Polaris missiles to Britain. In return, Britain agreed to commit her nuclear forces to NATO. This was consistent with NATO's so-called "Athens Guidelines" of 1962. These described in general terms the situations in which it might be necessary to use nuclear weapons in NATO's defense and the degree to which political consultation on such use might take place. Both Britain and the United States committed themselves to consult with their allies, time and circumstances permitting, before releasing their weapons for use. Nevertheless, clinging to its independent nuclear policy, the British successfully insisted in the Nassau Agreement that the nuclear force be officially recognized as independent when "supreme national interests are at stake."

Under the reign of successive Conservative administrations from 1951 to 1964, the nuclear force was stressed as a national "virility" symbol, increasing Britain's influence in world affairs and helping deter an attack on Britain if the United States suddenly became isolationist. Thus, the stress during this period was on independence, rather than the deterrent's role within NATO. As Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home explained in a 1964 pre-election speech: "Britain's nuclear arm is our sole defence against blackmail or attack by a

nuclear power and it is our only passport to the highest councils of the world where matters of peace and war are decided in a nuclear age."<sup>20</sup>

The new Labour government of 1964 was irritated by this chauvinist Tory attitude regarding nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons and strategy had become a source of an emotional political battle in the Labour Party in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the left wing of the party, aided by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), attempted to secure unilateral British nuclear disarmament and Britain's withdrawal from the NATO Alliance. These factions managed to orchestrate a Labour resolution calling for the unilateral abandonment of nuclear weaponry. The reversal of this resolution a year later caused a great deal of dissension in the Labour movement, which typically has been torn between the demands of *realpolitik* and the seductive left-wing theories of Socialist foreign policy intellectuals.

Because of these strains, Labour opted to downplay the importance and independence of British nuclear forces, not wanting to exacerbate political divisions within the Party. Indeed, what Labour publicly emphasized after taking office in 1964 was the fact that the British nuclear force was not independent but inevitably tied to the NATO deterrent. For example, in a speech to the House of Commons soon after Labour took power in 1964, Prime Minister Harold Wilson noted how dependent, in fact, Britain was on the United States for important components of the nuclear force. He also questioned the credibility of Britain acting alone in a nuclear war:

The argument which we have had is that one day we may get some lunatic American President who, when the crunch came, was prepared to retire to Fortress America and to leave Europe to its fate. We have now answered that point, because we have made it clear that this [deterrent] is committed to NATO as long as the alliance lasts.<sup>21</sup>

Labour also renounced not only Conservative backing for an "independent" British force but also British support for a policy of massive retaliation. Indeed, Labour spokesmen during the last two decades have argued that a policy of massive retaliation is "suicide" and they have expressed public support for conventional defense, "graduated deterrence," and the 1967 NATO-adopted policy of flexible response. They have supported the idea that NATO "should be able to deter, and if necessary, to counter military aggression of varying scales

<sup>20</sup>D. Butler and A. King, *The British General Election of 1964*, Macmillan, London, 1965, p. 131.

<sup>21</sup>Harold Wilson, *A Personal Record: The Labour Government, 1964-1970*, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1971, pp. 55-56.

in the NATO area." To secure this, Labour, in office, has backed NATO having a wide range of forces equipped with a balanced mixture of conventional, theater nuclear, and strategic nuclear weapons in order to make a potential aggressor "uncertain regarding the timing or circumstances in which they would be used."<sup>22</sup> The 1976 Labour-issued Defence White Paper, for example, although vague on the details of British nuclear policy, stressed the need for Britain's support of NATO's flexible response strategy:

It is, therefore, NATO's strategy, if deterrence fails, to meet aggression with a defence tailored to the situation, selecting a suitable level of response from a wide range of options to restore the territorial and maritime integrity of the Alliance. The knowledge that NATO has a realistic strategy of this kind is itself an important element in deterrence.<sup>23</sup>

In short, to paper over differences with the party, Labour has frequently stressed the NATO, not the independent, aspect of Britain's nuclear forces.

Since the Conservatives came back into office in 1979, there has been some official reversion to the notion of an "independent British nuclear force." Once again, the British government has recently been stressing the importance and autonomy of British nuclear forces. Once again, there has been an emphasis on the importance of Britain's nuclear forces, underscored by the proposed cutbacks in 1981 of conventional naval forces and the decision to acquire Trident I and then Trident II instead. As John Nott summarily noted in the spring of 1982:

While the United Kingdom has every confidence in the American strategic guarantee, it is possible that at some time in the future under circumstances that were different from those prevailing now, a Soviet leadership might calculate, however mistakenly, that it could risk or threaten a nuclear attack on Europe without involving the strategic forces of the United States.

If the Soviets were ever tempted to make such an horrendous miscalculation the existence of an immensely powerful nuclear force [Britain's] would be an enormous complicating factor and a powerful argument for Soviet caution. . . .

An independent nuclear deterrent depended upon being truly independent. . . . Britain was in no way dependent on the United

<sup>22</sup>See *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, NATO Information Service, Brussels, 1981, pp. 139-140.

<sup>23</sup>*Statement on Defence Estimates, 1976*, Cmnd. 6432, pp. 9-10.

States for communications, targeting or for any other matter of day-to-day operation of the force.<sup>24</sup>

Many questions about the details of and strategic rationale for current and prospective British nuclear policy remain unanswered, but the government will probably be forced to address these issues publicly in coming months and years. Nuclear weapons policies, in the United Kingdom as well as elsewhere, have become political issues as much as military ones. In Britain, this seems particularly likely to be the case in light of the controversial Trident decisions, the uncertain future of Britain's naval forces, the 1982 Falklands War, and the generally negative and outspoken views of the opposition parties about nuclear weapons.

This turn of events represents a new challenge for future British governments. British nuclear policymaking has been characterized by extreme secrecy, obfuscation, and a lack of close coordination with other NATO countries. Now it appears that future British governments will have to explain and defend nuclear policies to an unprecedented degree and also to coordinate these policies more closely within the NATO framework.

This study should help put British nuclear weapons policies and the nuclear policymaking process in perspective by shedding some light on how the important actors within the political system—the executive branch, the Parliament, the political parties, the media, the trade unions, and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—have affected and will probably affect nuclear policies in Britain. The policies that are emphasized relate principally to Britain's independent nuclear forces, although British nuclear policy within the NATO framework is treated as appropriate.

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<sup>24</sup>*The Times*, 29 March 1982.

## II. THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The British government's executive branch plays a dominant role in the nuclear policy process. Composed of the political leaders in the ruling party<sup>1</sup> and the senior civil servants and military officials in Whitehall, the executive branch has been the central actor in past nuclear policymaking and its dominance on nuclear matters will probably continue unless there is a dramatic change in the British political system. All of the following decisions were taken by the executive branch of Her Majesty's Government with little *direct* reference either to Parliament or to other governmental or nongovernmental actors in the British political system: to proceed with a wartime atomic project in conjunction with the United States; to build the bomb independently in January 1947; to increase the emphasis on nuclear weaponry in 1952; to adopt a strategy of massive retaliation in 1957; to build V-bombers and the Blue Streak ballistic missile; to buy Skybolt and then Polaris from the United States; to permit the basing of American strategic bombers, Thor missiles, F-111s and GLCMs in Britain; to spend £1000 million to procure the Chevaline penetrating warhead; to construct plants in Britain capable of producing tritium; and to procure Trident I and II.

The reasons for the executive branch's dominance in nuclear policy matters lie primarily in: the highly secretive nature of British governmental policymaking, particularly in the rarified field of nuclear weapons and strategy; the nature of Britain's two-party parliamentary system; and the critical policy role of the powerful civil service.

### SECRECY

Extreme secrecy is a hallmark of the British government. Every politician and civil servant can be prosecuted under the provisions of the 1911 Official Secrets Act, which states that no official can release confidential information pertaining to government decisions. The deep secrecy surrounding the internal machinations of Whitehall is exemplified in the following guidance given to civil servants in the Cabinet Office:

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<sup>1</sup>Approximately 100 Members of Parliament or peers from the ruling party serve both in the House of Commons or Lords and as ministers in the government. The highest ranking are Secretaries of State, who head departments and regularly participate in cabinet discussions, followed by various grades of Under-Secretaries.



It has always been maintained by successive administrations that disclosure of the processes by which government decisions are reached weakens the collective responsibility of ministers, which is what welds the separate functions of government into a single administration. The first rule, therefore, is that even the existence of particular cabinet committees should not be disclosed—still less their composition, terms of reference, etc.<sup>2</sup>

The media are also tightly controlled by the government under the "D-notice" system, by which each newspaper must "voluntarily" submit materials relating to national security to Whitehall before publication. The Falklands campaign demonstrated just how rigid and effective this information control system can be, as the British government was able to engage in selective "disinformation" and conceal mobilization procedures, combat losses, and force movements.<sup>3</sup>

Nuclear weapons policy has been developed under this cloak of extreme secrecy, greatly enhancing the decisionmaking role of a selected elite of British politicians and civil servants in the executive branch. The 1947 decision to build the atomic bomb, for example, was so secret that Prime Minister Attlee did not even tell some of his cabinet colleagues (let alone back-bench members of Parliament) that the government had decided to proceed with the expensive, momentous project.<sup>4</sup> The strategy to place greater emphasis on the role of nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces, as outlined in the 1952 Chiefs of Staff Global Strategy Paper, was really made widely known only five years later when the government decided to promulgate the "Sandys Doctrine" publicly.

The examples of the Chevaline and Trident projects also illustrate the continuing secretive nature of the nuclear decisionmaking process. The Chevaline program was initiated in the late 1960s because of British worries that Soviet advances in antiballistic missile systems would reduce the penetrability and hence the credibility of the newly deployed Polaris force. The cabinet considered purchasing the Poseidon missile and warhead from the United States, but in view of the controversy that would have ensued had the government suddenly decided to upgrade the recently completed Polaris force, it decided instead to secretly build an all-British warhead with decoys and variable trajectory reentry vehicles to improve the penetration capabilities of the

<sup>2</sup>*The Economist*, 6 February 1982, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>See Sec. IV for a more detailed analysis of the role of the media.

<sup>4</sup>F. Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers*, Heinemann, London, 1961, pp. 90-91.

existing deterrent force. This project was actually begun in 1972 and reached operational status in November 1982. The existence of this project was not known outside a small part of the executive branch of the British government until the Chevaline warhead had almost reached operational status in January 1980, even though by that time more than £1 billion had been secretly expended.<sup>5</sup> Faced with the startling announcement of this *fait accompli*, Parliament was unable to do anything beyond issuing a report criticizing the management and accounting procedures in the Ministry of Defence.<sup>6</sup>

Strict secrecy also characterized the Trident I decision. Although it was increasingly apparent that some difficult choices had to be made regarding a successor to Polaris, internal government discussion and negotiations with the United States were initiated under conditions of extreme secrecy soon after the Conservatives took power in May 1979, after which a final decision was announced in June 1980 to Parliament. Similar conditions surrounded the Trident II decision. Such secrecy was not too surprising to older MPs; after all, the budget for the original project to build an atomic bomb in 1947 had been concealed in the Civil Contingency Fund for the maintenance of public buildings in Britain.

A further indication of the strict secrecy surrounding nuclear policy issues in Britain is found in the fact that the government still has not released—either publicly or confidentially—any details concerning its free-fall nuclear bombs, naval nuclear weapons, and the old Polaris or new Chevaline warheads. There have also been no statements regarding the total number of targets of British warheads. For that matter, as a recent policy paper on the Trident decision has stated, British governments “have always declined to make public their nuclear targeting policy and plans, or to define precisely what minimum level of destructive capability they judged necessary for deterrence.”<sup>7</sup> The reasons for this lie in Whitehall’s natural predilection for secrecy and the fact that Britain’s nuclear forces are officially assigned to NATO, which itself is averse to public discussion involving the use of nuclear weapons. This means, however, that British parliamentarians or media commentators are unable to engage in sophisticated discussion of the targeting plans for Polaris and other British nuclear systems or the British equivalent of a directive such as PD59, simply because, except for a few executive branch members, no one knows anything about

<sup>5</sup>L. Freedman, *Britain and Nuclear Weapons*, Macmillan, London, 1980, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup>*The Guardian*, 22 April 1982.

<sup>7</sup>*The Future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force*, Defence Open Government Document 80/23, London, July 1980.

British nuclear plans should deterrence fail, beyond vague speculation that Moscow is a logical target.

### WEAK PARLIAMENTARY ROLE

The executive branch's predominant influence on nuclear issues is aided by Britain's unique parliamentary system. Unlike the vast majority of the world's parliamentary systems, Britain has, in essence, a two-party system, which considerably enhances the power of the executive branch. Only one government since World War II—the Labour administration of 1974–1979—has been dependent upon other parties (the Liberal and Scottish nationalist parties) to maintain a majority in Parliament. All other governments—including the current Conservative administration—have enjoyed a working majority and have been able to pursue such issues as nuclear policy with virtually no interference from the political opposition in the House of Commons. In policymaking, the complex coalitions that force parliamentary governments in other nations, such as the Netherlands or Belgium, to listen to and often accommodate the views of competing or aligned political factions do not at present exist in Britain.

To stay in power, a British government must maintain a majority in the House of Commons.<sup>8</sup> During a government's allotted five-year term, there are only two ways in which it can fall from power: A vote of no confidence in the Commons can force a government to resign; and if the executive is unable to gain a majority vote on an issue central to government policy (such as the budget), it must either resign or seek a vote of confidence. Such a denouement is exceedingly unpopular with both political leaders and MPs of the ruling party. Therefore, to cope with the constant threat of being turned out of office, British political parties have developed great internal unity, cohesiveness, and voting discipline, particularly with respect to such issues as nuclear policy.

There are several underlying reasons for such strong party discipline in the Commons. The idea of crossing party lines on votes, a common occurrence in the American Congress, is almost unheard of in Britain, because a rebellious MP could trigger new elections, an unwelcome prospect for both MP and party alike. Accordingly, MPs who fail to uphold the party line generally earn the enmity of parliamentary colleagues and inevitably fail to gain reselection and funding from the

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<sup>8</sup>Although Britain ostensibly has a bicameral legislature, the House of Lords does not enjoy any real power because of constitutional reforms carried out in 1911.

local party chapter for the next campaign. Further, the Prime Minister and his or her political entourage in the executive branch control all Cabinet appointments. An MP aspiring to cabinet office—the dream of most British politicians—hardly wishes to foment trouble from the backbenches of the House of Commons. At the same time, roughly 100 MPs in the ruling party serve simultaneously as junior or senior ministers in the government. These ministers predictably want to rise in power within the government, not bring about its demise. As *The Economist* has observed:

Any British prime minister with a working majority in the House of Commons has unfettered executive power beyond an American president's dreams.

All MPs vote with their party because to do otherwise excites disfavour, because of constituency party pressure and because they went to parliament not primarily as local men . . . but to maintain their party in power. . . .

The prevailing sentiment is one of party loyalty and of a desire to back up government (or the opposition leaders) against the other side. . . . Because it has this almost automatic majority, the government has virtual control of the houses.<sup>9</sup>

Given such highly unified parties, most governments have little trouble in pushing their legislative programs through the Parliament. Although the Commons can serve as a sounding board of political opinion in the country and allow Whitehall to test the political waters, it rarely initiates or seriously changes legislation, particularly in the national security area. This role has been allotted to the executive branch through precedent, procedure, and the MPs' perception of their proper role. Indeed, the Commons is not a true legislature in the sense that it formulates legislation, it is in many ways an extension of the executive. The major function of Parliament is the *ratification* of policy rather than formulation or alteration, and ratification is generally automatic.

The skewed balance of power between the executive and the Parliament is very apparent on defense issues. Here, the previous lack of public concern about defense policy matters has strongly reinforced the dominant role of the executive branch. Perhaps the public's lack of interest in and knowledge about defense policy is responsible for the fact that only 5 percent of Parliament's time was spent debating de-

<sup>9</sup>*The Economist*, 5 November 1977, pp. 11-16.

fense issues in the 1950s, even though the armed services consumed over 25 percent of the total government budget in this period.<sup>10</sup>

Parliament will probably devote greater attention to defense issues in coming years. The moribund state of the British economy, the need to make enormously expensive (and internally contentious) resource allocation decisions that will shape British defense policy for decades to come, public concern over Trident, GLCM deployments in Britain, the possible outbreak of nuclear conflict, and the repercussions of the Falklands War have all contributed to growing parliamentary and public interest in defense issues. Interest in issues, however, does not necessarily translate into policy influence. And, on these issues particularly, Parliament is severely handicapped because of the weakness of its formal policy machinery.

Although Parliament is charged with reviewing British defense and nuclear policies, it really does not become involved in helping to *formulate* policy in this area. To effectively help shape defense policy, a legislative body must have information and, perhaps more important, real control over spending. Only three parliamentary bodies are directly concerned with defense spending: the Defence Sub-Committee of the Parliamentary Accounts Committee, the Defence Sub-Committee of the Expenditure Committee, and the newly formed Defence Select Committee.

The all-party Parliamentary Accounts Committee (PAC) was set up in 1866 to see that government spending—as approved by Parliament—was carried out in the manner intended. The PAC reviews past management of spending.<sup>11</sup> Its oversight of and influence on defense policy is typically very weak, as illustrated by its role in the Chevaline program. First, the PAC was not even aware of the program's existence until informed by the executive many years later. Second, its response was limited to issuing a report criticizing the Ministry of Defence's general accounting procedures.<sup>12</sup> Although such periodic criticism may be embarrassing to the executive, it has not led to any meaningful alteration in the balance of power between the executive branch and the Commons on nuclear policy issues.

The general powerlessness of the PAC and Parliament regarding the control of spending led to the 1970 formation of the Expenditure Committee. To make judgments about the executive's cost-effective use of resources for defense projects, the MPs serving on the Defence Sub-

<sup>10</sup>Snyder, *The Politics of British Defense Policy*, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup>A. Robinson, *Parliament and Public Spending: The Expenditure Committee of the House of Commons, 1970-76*, Heinemann, London, 1978, pp. 37-38.

<sup>12</sup>See *The Guardian*, 22 April 1982.

Committee of the Expenditure Committee interview government officials while examining a range of policy questions. They then issue their findings and recommendations in public reports, which are frequently cited in parliamentary debates.

The roughly 17 meetings per year of the Defence Sub-Committee have produced a series of reports on a wide array of issues, ranging from "Service Married Quarters in Gibraltar" to "British Defence Policy." Overall, the Defence Sub-Committee has exercised little influence on policy. Its reports periodically improve parliamentary knowledge about defense matters generally and can lead to more informed criticism of government policy, but the executive is not mandated to follow its recommendations. Indeed, the only action a government must take in response to a critical subcommittee report is to issue a reply, and as one analyst of the Expenditure Committee has summarily lamented, "The basic problem with the Expenditure Committee is that it has to rely on influence; it has no power over expenditure."<sup>13</sup> This, in fact, suits most MPs, for as one member of the Defence Sub-Committee stated:

If the [Defence Sub-] Committee were to get too deep into policy-making, it would lead to a fragmentation of the policy process; and if there is a fragmentation of the policy process decisions do not get made. The responsibility for Defence policy clearly lies with the Executive.<sup>14</sup>

The general impotence of Parliament on defense and other policy issues led in 1980 to the founding of several new Select Committees, including one devoted to an examination of defense policy. Eleven MPs now serve on the Defence Select Committee, which operates in much the same manner as the Expenditure Sub-Committees—the MPs meet periodically with civil servants and ministers to gain more information about government policies. Committee members are also given access to a limited amount of classified data.<sup>15</sup> It is too early to tell if the new Defence Select Committee will be inclined or able to increase Parliament's influence on nuclear matters, but past precedent leads one to be skeptical.

Admittedly, the opposition can use Parliament as a public platform on which to question the government about its nuclear policy. But without a voting majority, such actions are usually symbolic. In

<sup>13</sup>Robinson, *Parliament and Public Spending*, p. 153.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>15</sup>See *The Economist*, 14 August 1982, p. 48; and A. Sampson, *The Changing Anatomy of Britain*, Random House, New York, 1983, pp. 20–22.

December 1982, for example, Soviet arms control offers coupled with the announcement that the United States was planning to set up a new military headquarters in Britain resulted in a debate in the House of Commons at the behest of Denis Healey, Labour's deputy leader. The administration delivered a curt and uninformative reply and then successfully pushed for a vote to end the debate.<sup>16</sup> A two-party parliamentary system does not provide the opposition with much power. Perhaps that is why a senior British civil servant, when asked if the fact that a majority of the British public opposed the procurement of Trident II and the deployment of cruise missiles would have any effect on Conservative nuclear policy, stated, "I think you can pretty well ignore those polls." This situation might change in coming years should the Liberal/Social Democrat Party alliance gain great power. A three-party system without a clear-cut majority for any single party would, for example, force the formation of a coalition or minority government and provide other parties with the opportunity to apply leverage across a range of issues, including nuclear policy. As will be seen, however, the Liberal/SDP alliance may require an unlikely change in Britain's electoral system to attain much power.

### POWERFUL CIVIL SERVICE

The third reason the executive branch exerts a dominant influence on nuclear policy issues lies in the role of the British civil service, which exercises a powerful influence over the entire range of British policymaking. De Gaulle once remarked that combating the British government was like fighting an unforgetting and tenacious machine; should you gain in one area, however momentarily, other British departments, possessed of bureaucratic memory and seemingly indefatigable civil servants, would relentlessly grind you down until British interests were given a proper airing. The unity and cohesion of the British government's policy process, where administrations speak with a single voice and leaks are rare (and usually well orchestrated), are due in large part to the pervasive and unifying influence of Britain's civil servants. The position of civil servants within the government is one area where Britain differs considerably from the United States. A change in British government means the injection of only 100 new political appointees into Whitehall. When the monarch asks a Prime Minister to take power, the government is generally ready to start operating immediately.

<sup>16</sup>For a transcript of the proceedings, see *The Times*, 15 December 1982.

The civil service was founded in the mid-nineteenth century to provide a means for the government to examine and implement policy on a continuing basis. Today, there are approximately 730,000 civil servants in Britain out of a total population of 55 million. The majority work as clerks, typists, and factory workers in government-run industry, such as ordnance plants. Roughly 22,000 hold middle management positions, but only 4000 are Whitehall policymakers—that is, senior civil servants holding the rank, in ascending order, of Assistant Under-Secretary, Under-Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or Permanent Secretary.

The civil service recruiting procedures stress candidates with a generalist education. Top students from the best universities, usually Oxford and Cambridge, are directly recruited into the higher ranks of civil service, and roughly 70 percent of the 4000 decisionmaking elite have degrees in history or classics. Very few have technical specialist skills, as critics of economic policy, in particular, are wont to complain.

Criticized by both the left wing of the Labour Party and the right wing of the Conservative Party as being too influential, the civil service unquestionably plays an important role on all issues, including those relating to defense and nuclear policy. Senior civil servants, outnumbering their political chiefs by a ratio of forty to one, enjoy permanent appointments. This is especially important in nuclear weapons procurement policy, where true expertise is slowly gained over time and acquisition schedules are often measured in terms of decades. In the case of the Chevaline program, for example, Labour and Conservative politicians arrived and departed in rapid succession, but a core of civil servants and military officers directed the secretive project over a period of several years.

The policy influence of civil servants is also magnified by the often temporary nature of cabinet appointments, particularly in the Ministry of Defence. The Conservatives, for example, had no less than eight different Defence Ministers in the years 1951 to 1964 and seem to be headed in a similar direction during the Thatcher administration. By virtue of their long years of experience in the labyrinth of Whitehall, civil servants frequently have a better understanding of defense policy choice intricacies and are adept at framing alternatives in a manner that can make civil servants' views critically important. As one former cabinet minister wrote in his diary after ten days in office:

At first I felt like someone in a padded cell, but now I must modify this. In fact I feel like someone floating on the most comfortable support. The whole Department is there to support the Minister. Into his in-tray come hour-by-hour notes with suggestions as to what



he should do. Everything is done to sustain him in the line officials think he should take. But if one is very careful and conscious one is aware that the supporting soft framework of recommendations is the result of a great deal of secret discussion between the civil servants below. There is a constant debate as to how the Minister should be advised or, shall we say, directed and pushed and cajoled into the line required by the Ministry. . . . Each Ministry has its own departmental policy and this policy goes on while Ministers come and go.<sup>17</sup>

Simply the myriad technical arguments associated with nuclear issues enhance the policy role of civil servants, especially defense experts and their counterparts in the military services. After all, MPs suddenly become political leaders after an election or cabinet reshuffle; and, while serving in the Commons, they do not generally have great defense expertise of their own or the ability to call on large research staffs to procure sophisticated advice on defense. How, for example, can a minister in Britain ascertain that a force of submarines bearing cruise missiles will be more expensive to procure and support than a force of Trident submarines, except by turning to the civil service? As one former Prime Minister complained:

In all these affairs Prime Ministers, Ministers of Defence and Cabinets are under a great handicap. The technicalities and uncertainties of the sophisticated weapons which they have to authorise are out of the range of normal experience. There is today a far greater gap between their knowledge and the expert advice which they receive than there has ever been in the history of war.<sup>18</sup>

Political appointees, even in the defense area, typically have too many demands on their time to devote great attention to the details of nuclear programs. They must attend meetings in the House of Commons, participate in cabinet sessions, visit their constituencies, and attend party functions. Further, the civil service maintains a tight hold on the flow of information, weeding out unwanted data before they reach the eyes of the minister. Many informal meetings take place in the senior ranks of the civil service; notes are exchanged on the foibles of particular ministers and gossip is gleaned from the "Whitehall grapevine." Thus, many problems are worked out informally before they are even brought to the attention of the political chiefs. According to one Assistant Under-Secretary:

<sup>17</sup>R. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, Vol. I, Jonathan Cape, London, 1975, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup>H. Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, Macmillan Press, London, 1972, p. 43.

It's difficult for an outsider to appreciate how chummy things are in the Civil Service. You've probably known each other for fifteen years—lots of informal contacts and socialising. You ring each other up and gossip about things. Not everyone agrees with this style of doing things, but most do. Formal discussion follows after informal chats.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, civil servants are not directly accountable to Parliament for their actions, because under the Official Secrets Act of 1911, civil servants are not permitted by law to present information obtained during their public service. The civil service states that this lack of accountability aids the government policy process; civil servants can make honest recommendations to their political masters without fear of retribution. One critic of the civil service, however, has summarily noted, "So public business continues [on defense among other issues] almost free from public scrutiny, and officials responsible for obvious blunders continue to hold their positions."<sup>20</sup>

Of course, civil servants must strive to formulate policies broadly acceptable to the political backers and MPs of the ruling party in the Commons. As Prime Minister Wilson noted: "Neutral and non-political as the civil service is, it is sharp as any body of men in recognizing political reality."<sup>21</sup> But even with this political context in mind, it is important to remember that any nuclear policy issues put to the British government will first and foremost encounter the civil service machine in the different executive agencies; it is here that these matters will be scrutinized and analyzed at the greatest length.

## NUCLEAR POLICYMAKING WITHIN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Viewed externally, civil servants, senior military officials, and political leaders in the executive branch give the impression of an extremely homogeneous group with a unified approach to policy issues. This is a product of both secrecy and the doctrine of "collective responsibility," which demands that all members of the cabinet must accept and, if necessary, defend cabinet decisions. Governments hold that a common front is needed to keep the ruling party united, hold the opposition at

<sup>19</sup>H. Hecla and A. Wildavsky, *The Private Government of Public Money: Community and Policy Inside British Politics*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup>Seers, "The Structure of Power," in H. Thomas, *Crisis in the Civil Service*, A. Blond Co., London, 1968, pp. 85-86.

<sup>21</sup>H. Wilson, *A Personal Record: The Labor Government, 1964-70*, Little, Brown, & Co., Boston, 1971, p. 20.

bay, and not give "aid and comfort" to enemies abroad. Policy differences within the cabinet are a closely guarded secret, particularly on sensitive defense issues, and are not often shared with the media. A Defence Secretary or service minister who disagrees with his colleagues over a given issue may resign to express displeasure—and several have—but he may not and does not reveal policy divisions within the government to the media. Signs of internal division usually surface only after resignations or cabinet reshuffles; and in these cases, the cause of friction is often unknown.

Nonetheless, divisions of opinion often do exist within the executive branch on nuclear policy issues; as in any large bureaucratic structure, competing factions and rival power centers develop. Ministers, civil servants, and military officers develop strong departmental loyalties, thus fostering parochial interests. Civil servants and military officers, for example, generally judge the worth of their political masters by how well the latter can defend substantive departmental interests; and political appointees generally judge their own worth by how much they can expand their personal empire.

Friction over nuclear policy within the executive branch is caused by differences over two intimately related issues—strategy and the allocation of resources to support the strategy. Specifically, there is little disagreement on the need for Britain to possess nuclear weapons. British governments have long been renowned for their pragmatism and *Realpolitik* approach to maintaining British security. As one former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office stated, "I have never witnessed a discussion when idealism was placed above British interests." The possession of British nuclear weapons is perceived as being strongly in Britain's interests, on the grounds of both guaranteeing British survival and increasing British influence in international affairs. The British government officially couches the need for British nuclear forces in terms of NATO, but British national interests are paramount.

Nor is there much dissension within the executive branch on the basing of American nuclear weapons or supporting facilities on British soil. Britain was the first European state to permit the stationing of U.S. nuclear-capable forces on its soil: A wing of American B-29s began operating from three British bases soon after the outbreak of the Berlin crisis in mid-1948.

Britain permitted the basing of these and subsequent weapons for three reasons. First, most British officials and politicians believe that an American commitment to defend Europe is vital to British security. The placement of American nuclear weapons and other military

facilities on British soil is both a symbol of the U.S. commitment and a means to further enmesh the United States in defending Europe. Second, the simple presence of these weapons is believed to enhance deterrence in operational terms by further complicating Soviet military planning and decisionmaking.<sup>22</sup> And third, the British hope to ease the deployment of ground-launched cruise and Pershing missiles in Germany, Italy, and elsewhere on the continent.

Consistent with this, the British support—and have supported—NATO's flexible response doctrine. For the British, flexible response is understood in any nuclear phase as political signalling, not military war-fighting, and there is a profound belief at all levels of government that NATO cannot win a war fought with widespread use of nuclear weapons. However, British officials value pragmatism and believe that in cases where deterrence fails some serious attention should be devoted to NATO's nuclear plans to enhance NATO's deterrent posture. For example, Michael Quinlan, a senior civil servant formerly specializing in nuclear affairs, whose opinions were held in great respect by Prime Minister Thatcher, noted that realistic plans for the use of nuclear weapons were vital for NATO security. As he stated in a speech that was vetted by the civil service machinery:

The fact is that the deterrent effect of weapons and plans is not something separate from and independent of their capability for actual use; it operates precisely through capability for use. If weapons are not capable of realistic use they cannot deter; the more difficult they are to use in any rational way the less credible they are, and accordingly the less likely to deter; and if an adversary thinks we have no meaningful plans for use he will think we have no serious will to resist. Like it or not, there lies inescapably at the heart of deterrence a kind of paradox. The more likely it is that you will use your capability if you need to, the less likely it is that you will ever be faced with the need. And the converse is equally true. . . . Let it be clear, though, that what I am saying is that we must have weapons capable of credible use, and plans to match.<sup>23</sup>

In general, then, the pragmatic British officials in Whitehall generally favor a robust defense establishment and support a "realistic" nuclear stance for NATO. That being said, the primary apparent cause of friction over nuclear matters within the executive branch is usually over the allocation of resources. Although it is occasionally difficult to ascertain which comes first, strategic objectives or allocation

<sup>22</sup>At the same time, of course, the presence of these weapons complicates NATO planning, because it is unclear whether a Soviet nuclear strike against American nuclear bases in Britain would be cause for Britain to strike back independently.

<sup>23</sup>M. Quinlan, "Preventing War: Deterrence and Nuclear Weapons," a paper given at the Civil Defence Conference, York, 2 July 1981.

decisions, there is little question that British defense policy has been dominated for the past four decades by the specter of a declining (in real terms) economic base. Britain did not willingly withdraw from the pursuit of global power after World War II; instead, the withdrawal was driven largely by economic pressure, and the continuing troubles of the British economy have affected the country's defense policy up to the present day.

The British seem to have largely accepted the need for a strong conventional arm as both a deterrent and a means to control escalation. They also wish to develop a realistic nuclear policy for NATO. However, the moribund state of the economy has required that some parts of the British defense establishment be periodically pruned, and this in turn has led to great internal dissension. The battles that take place over nuclear policy and the allocation of defense resources concern four executive branch agencies—the Cabinet Office, the Treasury, the Ministry of Defence, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The role and interests of these departments in nuclear policy are described below.

### THE CABINET OFFICE

The Cabinet Office, composed of a small number of senior civil servants housed in Number Ten Downing Street, plays an important role in nuclear policy issues. Established during World War I, it grew steadily in power during subsequent years. The Cabinet Office is responsible for circulating minutes of cabinet meetings to give greater coherence to government policy. By virtue of this coordinating function, it is often the first part of the executive to know about possible new directions in government policy. Most bureaucracies thrive on information, and the Cabinet Office is able to trade intelligence of the highest value. It is at the center of any important issue, particularly in the fields of economic, foreign, and defense policy. Further, the Cabinet Office's power has expanded in the wake of the Falklands War after the Prime Minister added two senior officials, Sir Anthony Parsons and Sir Anthony Duff, to oversee intelligence assessments.

Although small compared with the Treasury or the Ministry of Defence, the Cabinet Office's influence on nuclear issues stems directly from the fact that it has the ear of the Prime Minister. Unlike other departments, it does not have specific control over expenditures or programs; rather, it coordinates the actions of government departments on nuclear policy issues and hence often frames the terms of internal Whitehall debates. Further, it is in a position to offer assessments on

departmental recommendations and helps shape the Prime Minister's perspectives on a range of nuclear issues. British leaders invariably have valued the views of Cabinet Office civil servants because they generally rise above *departmental* interests and are perceived to frame issues in terms of *prime ministerial* interests.

Sir Robert Armstrong, the current Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet, for example, is widely acknowledged to be the most powerful civil servant in Britain. A measure of his power can be seen in the fact that he headed the team of civil servants that negotiated the Trident II deal with the United States. One of his predecessors, Sir Burke Trend, enjoyed a similar position; when President Nixon met with Prime Minister Edward Heath in 1973, Secretary of State Kissinger met with Trend instead of the British Foreign Secretary to discuss Anglo-American relations. In short, Prime Ministers often depend upon the advice of senior officials in the Cabinet Office, a reality reflected in the veiled allusions to the "valued advice" of these civil servants in their memoirs.

## TREASURY

A major challenger to the Cabinet Office's power is the Treasury, the nemesis of every spending department. The power of the Treasury has grown because the British economy's inability to support Britain's global role has forced strategic retrenchment. By virtue of its power over economic policy and resource allocation, the Treasury is inevitably at the center of most defense and nuclear decisions.

The Treasury's role in the formulation of policy is more easily identified than that of the Cabinet Office. Essentially, the Treasury is concerned with the size of the overall defense budget, including the cost of procuring and supporting nuclear systems.

Treasury bureaucrats frown on financial surprises, and it is in the best interests of every department to engage in full and frank discussions with the Treasury before proceeding past the conceptual stage. The larger the size of the project, the higher up in the Treasury hierarchy these informal discussions go. Nuclear programs are almost invariably discussed at the highest level. In the course of these discussions, the general Treasury guidelines, of which other departments are so painfully familiar, are: (1) let the spending department do the technical work; (2) be skeptical; (3) delay, probe, bargain, and delay again; and (4) look out for hidden expenditures—the thin edge of the financial wedge.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup>See Heclo and Wildavsky, pp. 49–50.

There was strong Treasury influence behind the development of the 1952 Chiefs of Staff Global Strategy Paper, a paper the service heads drew up under cabinet instructions to develop policy in light of nuclear weapons *and* economic reality. The 1957 "Sandys Plan," which made explicit the Global Strategy Paper's reliance on nuclear weapons as the cornerstone of British defense policy in Europe, similarly reflected strong Treasury pressure.

Treasury influence was also critically important in the subsequent 1960 choice of Skybolt to upgrade the British deterrent. This decision was strongly supported by officials at the Treasury, because the system was estimated to cost far less than a submarine-based force. When the government decided instead to procure Polaris in 1962, the Treasury's major interest was in the financial terms of the procurement agreement. At Nassau, the United States attempted to make the British pay a pro-rata based percentage of the research and development costs (some 11 percent). The British balked at this and offered instead to pay a 5 percent surcharge on the cost of the missile buy—an arrangement finally accepted by the United States. Britain, however, again under strong Treasury pressure, managed to reduce the surcharge payment four years later in return for letting the United States develop facilities at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.<sup>25</sup>

The Treasury also played an important role in choosing the number of submarines that would be built. Although five Polaris boats were initially planned to decrease the vulnerability of the deterrent to Soviet antisubmarine warfare capability (since two submarines could be on station at all times), the extra cost proved too much for the Treasury (and uneasy Labour politicians) to bear. Accordingly, only four boats were given the go-ahead.

Given the estimated £5 billion cost of the Trident I system, the Treasury played a powerful role in that decision as well. As in 1962, the United States attempted to secure a better financial deal by making the British pay a pro-rata percentage of the research and development costs (which would have amounted to \$400 million). The British preferred instead to pay a 5 percent surcharge on the costs of the Trident I missile (\$100 million), but made up part of the difference by agreeing to man Rapier anti-aircraft batteries at U.S. airbases in Britain (costing some \$180 million).

Procuring Trident II has involved far too risky a leap into the unknown for the Treasury, because the sophisticated system has not been fully developed and costed. Accordingly, the Treasury demanded a change in the procurement agreement. Except for agreeing to man the

<sup>25</sup>*The New York Times*, 17 October 1975.

Rapier batteries, Britain does not need to pay any surcharge except for a single lump sum payment of \$116 million for the costs of research and development (which are estimated at \$9 billion). In essence, Britain is paying the same surcharge for the far more costly Trident II missile and, at the behest of its Treasury officials, has protected itself from the dangers of R&D cost overruns.<sup>26</sup> Further, the Treasury successfully insisted that British companies be formally tied into the procurement process and have the option to bid on Trident components in order to spend more of the money in Britain. Such a policy ultimately proved popular with the government, because the prospect of creating new jobs made the system's expense more politically palatable.

On defense issues that are essentially doctrinal, the Treasury's role may not be so central. On such issues, the Ministry of Defence is the source of expertise and the critical executive agency.

## MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

The Ministry of Defence (MoD), largely because of its technical expertise, typically plays a central role in helping to formulate British nuclear policy and in carrying out the details of Britain's nuclear programs. MoD thinking about nuclear policy is generally influenced by the often uneasy relationship between the Secretary of State for Defence and the services, as well as by interservice rivalry. The political head of the MoD is often torn between a desire to maintain the fighting effectiveness of the armed forces and a concurrent desire to stay in tune with the cost-conscious wishes of the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer. At the same time, the services continually try to increase the size of the defense budget and their proportional share of the "pie." This web of conflicting interests and the tension between nuclear and conventional force needs have periodically led to frictions over nuclear policy within the MoD.

The internal tension and its effects on policy are exemplified by the organizational shufflings that have taken place during the MoD's existence. Right after World War II, British nuclear policy was shaped by strategic considerations, financial pressure, and also the interests of the individual services. Under the provisions of the 1946 White Paper, *Central Organisation for Defence*, the three services were placed under a single Ministry of Defence. Defence ministers, however, were severely constrained by the distinct official delineation of their area of authority—in general, they coordinated, rather than formulated, the

<sup>26</sup>See letter of C. Weinberger, U.S. Defense Secretary, to J. Nott, British Defence Secretary, 11 March 1982, *Administration of Ronald Reagan, 1982*, p. 289.



services' policy. The services were generally enthusiastic about developing a nuclear capability, but they were equally enthusiastic about maintaining conventional force levels. As a result, Britain's nuclear forces were largely grafted onto existing forces. A war with the Soviet Union, it was thought, would largely be a repeat of World War II with greater destruction.

The difficulty of attempting to coordinate rival service interests caused various unhappy defense ministers to arrive and depart in rapid succession during the 1950s. Harold Macmillan had been severely shaken by his short tenure as defense minister in the early 1950s, and after replacing Sir Anthony Eden as Prime Minister in the wake of the 1956 Suez debacle, Macmillan greatly increased the nominal powers of his new defense minister, Mr. Duncan Sandys. Formerly merely a coordinator, the latter now had

authority to give decisions on all matters of policy affecting the size, shape, or organisation and disposition of the Armed Forces, their equipment and supply (including defence research and development) and their pay and conditions of service. He will similarly have power of decision on any matters of Service administration or appointments which, in his opinion, are of special importance.<sup>27</sup>

This delegation of authority made sense on paper but there still was the problem of tremendous bureaucratic inertia and parochial service interests. The energetic Sandys managed to cut conventional forces by placing greater reliance on nuclear weaponry, but the services expressed displeasure; retired officers demonstrated their dissatisfaction with steamy letters to *The Times*, and some serving officers took the almost unprecedented step of criticizing the new policy in "informal," yet well-publicized, speeches.<sup>28</sup> Within a few years of Sandys's departure from office in 1958, the services were again directly vying with the Minister of Defence on defense and nuclear policy. It was largely service interests, for example, that led Whitehall to choose Skybolt over Polaris in 1960: Not only was the air-launched system cheaper, but the Royal Navy feared that SLBMs would take resources away from the conventional fleet, while the Royal Air Force had strong interests in keeping control of the strategic force.

The tensions within the MoD ultimately led to the crucial Thorneycroft-Mountbatten reforms of 1963. MoD policy recommendations in the nuclear age, it was argued, had to be a coordinated effort, not the result of individual service decisions. Accordingly, the political

<sup>27</sup>M. Howard, *The Central Organisation of Defence*, RUSI, London, 1970, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup>L. Martin, "The Market For Strategic Ideas in Britain: The Sandys Era," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. LVI, No. 1, 1962, pp. 31-33.

heads of the services (formerly Secretaries of State serving in the cabinet) were demoted to a more junior rank, and the three services became departments absorbed by the Ministry of Defence. Thus the political head of the MoD, rather than the political heads of the individual services, was to speak for the department in cabinet discussions, where policy is ultimately decided. Civil servants, instead of serving in a single armed service, were hereafter shifted about regularly to decrease the chances of strong service loyalties developing.

For some 15 years after the 1963 reforms, the services were held strongly in political check and were subjected to Labour-directed "Defence Reviews" in 1966 and 1975, which led to reductions in their size, commitments, and share of the GNP. However, the services successfully argued, with ministerial approval, for increases in their budgets in 1979, 1980, 1981, and 1982. The government has stressed that these increases symbolize Britain's commitment to NATO, but many observers attribute the increases to individual service pressure on a sympathetic Tory administration.

The strong internal schisms and tensions generated by interservice rivalries and the often conflicting relationship between the Secretary of Defence and the services themselves are bound to influence future British nuclear policy. Recent rumblings from the services over the expensive Trident decision provide some useful insights into these tensions. Because there are now no more "bits of the Empire" to abandon, and Britain's forces are increasingly configured to fight in Western Europe, any further cuts in conventional levels must come out of the protesting hides of one of the services. This in turn has increased service opposition to Trident, just as there was strong service opposition to the 1957 conventional force cuts and consequent reliance on nuclear weapons. Although there is strong service support for the possession of *some type of strategic force*, the effect of Trident's procurement on other systems is viewed with considerable concern by the services, a concern that will grow unless the defense budget grows as well.

The Army, traditionally the service slated for cutbacks in times of defense retrenchment, had previously been selected for a general re-equipment, with such material as the new Challenger main battle tanks, armored personnel carriers, communications equipment, and self-propelled guns. Potential international repercussions have to a large extent prevented the British government from cutting back the size of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), but a delay in the planned re-equipment schedule is growing increasingly likely. John Nott admitted as much when he stated, "I wouldn't expect any Army major in Germany who is waiting for his new SP 70 [self-propelled]

gun and is not aware of all the facts, to be rushing around shouting 'Hurrah for Trident.'"<sup>29</sup>

The Royal Air Force (RAF) is similarly concerned with the opportunity costs involved in the Trident decision. The RAF's dominant interests at present are to secure adequate funds to engage in training, maintain sufficient war stocks, and proceed with the rapid completion of the oft-delayed Tornado multi-role combat aircraft program. The latter cannot be cut much in view of its multinational procurement arrangement, but it can be (and has been) delayed. At present the MoD estimates that the Tornado program will consume 8 percent of the entire defense budget in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as 18 percent of the equipment budget.<sup>30</sup> With Trident simultaneously soaking up equipment capital at a similar rate, the RAF views this program with growing anxiety, as it would *any* nuclear program that directly affects its vital projects and potentially affects its ability to carry out its stated missions.

The service most directly affected by the Trident decision is, of course, the Royal Navy (RN), which was selected for cuts in the 1981 Defence Review, in large part a direct result of the Trident decision. Accordingly, considerable opposition to Trident has grown within the Navy. The RN has never been particularly enamored with its responsibility for the strategic force, as opposed to the more glamorous task of fighting Soviet submarines in the North Atlantic. The Admiralty, for example, did not attempt to press for the adoption of the Polaris system in 1960, when the United States gave Britain the choice of either SLBMs or the air-launched Skybolt, and instead preferred to emphasize the role of its strike carrier force.<sup>31</sup>

For some, cuts in the Navy suggest Britain's faltering international status and hence are difficult to accept in many political-maritime circles. The First Sea Lord recently took the most unusual step of publicly criticizing the naval cuts proposed in 1981 as a "con job."<sup>32</sup> Such public statements emerging from serving officers are almost unprecedented in Britain and illustrate the depth of antipathy toward the government's security policy. Moreover, even in the face of political pressures resulting from the Navy's meritorious service in the

<sup>29</sup>*The Guardian*, 12 March 1982.

<sup>30</sup>These estimates are drawn from *The United Kingdom Trident Programme*, Defence Open Government Document 82/1, Cmnd. 8517, London, 1982.

<sup>31</sup>The gradual phasing out of British fixed-wing aircraft carriers was announced in 1966, prompting numerous resignations in the Senior Service. The last large British carrier, ARK ROYAL, was decommissioned in the late 1970s and replaced by the less capable, but useful, INVINCIBLE class carriers.

<sup>32</sup>*The Guardian*, 6 September 1982.

Falklands War, the Thatcher government in the 1983 White Paper reaffirmed its decision to continue reducing the size of the front-line surface ship force over the coming decade, though the actual extent of the programmed cuts are still unclear.<sup>33</sup>

To summarize, the MoD is torn between the conflicting desires of maintaining Britain's conventional capability and modernizing the strategic deterrent. Both enterprises are extremely costly, and severe intra-MoD friction has been the result. The services do not object to the maintenance of a nuclear capability; such systems as dual-capable aircraft, short-range missiles, and artillery are perceived as an enhancement of NATO's deterrent *and* can also be used in the conventional role. Trident, however, is dedicated strictly to the nuclear strategic role and its focus and associated opportunity costs have engendered substantial service opposition.

In short, the services are among the strongest proponents in Britain of increased conventional defense spending. They, after all, have to carry out security directives; and, as Sir Solly Zuckerman, a former Chief Scientific Advisor to the cabinet, has noted, five out of the past seven Chiefs of the Defence Staff have stated that the use of nuclear weapons for the defense of Europe is of questionable value.<sup>34</sup> The Trident case shows, however, that service opposition to nuclear policy does not effectively compete with prime ministerial and Treasury directives, just as it could not during the Sandys era and the Labour-directed "Defence Reviews" of 1966 and 1975.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The fourth department directly concerned with nuclear policy is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). By virtue of its expertise in international affairs, it actively participates in the internal Whitehall debates on nuclear issues. Much to the FCO's dismay, however, it has lost influence in this policy area in recent years. Once the most prestigious department in Whitehall, the FCO lost a great deal of power to the Treasury between the two World Wars, a process arrested somewhat during World War II, but one that has continued apace during

<sup>33</sup>*Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1983*, Vol. I, London, 1983, p. 15. In a recent interview, one senior civil servant expressed the opinion that improvements in MoD efficiency have enabled a greater percentage of the defense budget to be allocated to equipment and hence the RN may stay at existing levels. In the 1960s, for example, only 34 percent of the budget, rather than the present day 46 percent, went to equipment procurement.

<sup>34</sup>Sir S. Zuckerman, *Nuclear Illusion and Reality*, The Viking Press, New York, 1982, p. 70.

the postwar period. In British defense decisions at present, the FCO now frequently finds itself on the outside, looking in on nuclear policy decisions made mainly by others.

Dean Acheson once commented in the 1960s that Britain had lost an Empire and had not yet found a role, which accurately describes the FCO's current dilemma. Though Britain is no longer a global power, it maintains the foreign policy and intelligence machine of one. In the 1970s, the wisdom of devoting much of Britain's elite personnel and financial resources to the FCO came under increasing fire and led to Labour calls for a reduction in the FCO's size in the late 1970s.<sup>35</sup> To justify its expensive existence, the FCO has frequently claimed that it was a critical vehicle to promote better British relations with the United States and the European Economic Community while concurrently expanding British trade with the world. As Lord Carrington stated before his resignation:

Our worldwide involvement remains. . . . It follows that every day foreign governments are taking decisions that intimately affect the jobs and the lives of ordinary British people. I cannot understand those who say that because we are not a super-power, foreign policy and the Foreign Office are no longer important.<sup>36</sup>

The desire of the FCO to maintain good relations with the United States while leading Britain to play a critical role within Western Europe has consistently shaped the FCO's approach to nuclear policy issues. During the Multilateral Force (MLF) affair in the early 1960s, for example, the Foreign Office pressed strongly for the proposed nuclear force, which would please the Americans and yet solidify Britain's role in Europe. More recently, similar U.S.-European concerns have frequently been apparent. For example, the FCO spearheaded a major campaign within the government against a 1976 Labour resolution calling for a £300 million cut in defense spending, fearing it would strain relations with Western Europe as well as the United States. And in September 1977, NATO General Secretary Dr. Joseph Luns publicly expressed great concern at the renewed possibility of a British cut in defense spending, which, he argued, would undermine NATO's strategy of flexible response. The FCO responded by spurring the government into stating its plans to increase defense spending by 3 percent per year.

On the Trident decision, the FCO has had mixed feelings. It has long favored the idea of an independent British deterrent, because such

<sup>35</sup>See *The Economist*, 5 November 1977, p. 24; 19 November 1977, p. 22; and 21 January 1978, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup>*The Times*, 26 March 1982.

a force enhances British prestige and influence in its international dealings. The Trident decision, however, explicitly and implicitly emphasizes Britain's "special relationship" with the United States and may, the FCO fears, jeopardize Britain's sometimes uneasy relationship with its European partners. Further, the FCO is gravely concerned about the possible negative effect of procuring Trident on Britain's conventional contribution to NATO, which would have the dubious distinction of displeasing both the United States and Britain's continental allies.

Attempting to balance British interests between the United States and Europe has also led to an attitude within the FCO—one often shared by many officials in Whitehall—that Britain should enhance her position as the central NATO "interpreter." The British are neither quite continental nor quite American, although they share cultural links with both and often believe that they are uniquely qualified to interpret continental attitudes to the United States and vice versa. Additionally, British officials in the FCO, perhaps attempting to recapture some of the FCO's prominence in the days when Britain was a world power, also often attempt to enhance their nation's diplomatic and intermediary role in East-West negotiations. As Lord Carrington, the former Foreign Secretary, stated:

Britain herself has an important role to play in developing a more sane and secure East-West relationship—not as a bridge, or an intermediary, not to spot the chance to split the difference. But to contribute our knowledge, experience, and mixture of firmness and flexibility to the efforts of our partners in Europe and America. We have a long and proud history of activity on this central question of international diplomacy. . . .

We must . . . continue our tradition of East-West activism. Under the present leadership, Britain has the prestige and the respect needed to make sure our voice is heard.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Lord Carrington, "The 1983 Alistair Buchan Memorial Lecture," *Survival*, Vol. XXV, No. 4, July/August 1983, pp. 152–153.

### III. THE POLITICAL PARTIES

Although exceedingly powerful, the executive branch and its composite departments formulate British nuclear policy within the context of the general political climate, which is shaped by and reflected in the activities of Britain's political parties. The British political scene for the past four decades has been characterized by a two-party system.<sup>1</sup> Following World War II, the Labour Party, which had only managed to form two weak and short-lived administrations between the two World Wars, secured enough parliamentary seats to form a majority government of its own, thus inaugurating almost four decades of the present "duopoly." The Labour Party has since alternated with the Conservative Party in forming governments; the Conservatives have ruled for twenty-one years (1951 to 1964, 1970 to 1974, and 1979 to the time this report was written (1983)), Labour for seventeen (1945 to 1951, 1964 to 1970, and 1974 to 1979). Accordingly, all British nuclear policy decisions have taken place under the aegis of one of these two parties.

Other political parties have not yet achieved enough seats in the House to challenge these two dominant parties. There are several fringe parties: the fascist National Front, the Marxist Communist Party, various Trotskyite factions such as the Workers Revolutionary Party, the nationalist Welsh and Scottish parties, and the Ulster Unionist Party, which has special interests in Northern Ireland. None of these has widespread popular support.<sup>2</sup>

The only serious challengers to the two dominant parties today are the Liberal Party and the Social Democrat Party (SDP). The latter was formed in May 1981 by a defecting group of right-wing Labour MPs, known as the "Gang of Four," who were alarmed at Labour's leftward turn in political direction on domestic and security issues. The Liberals and Social Democrats formed an alliance in June 1981 in an attempt to garner enough support in the next election to either form a government or hold the balance of power in the Commons.

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<sup>1</sup>The present two-party situation is something of a break with tradition. From 1885 to 1915, Britain was governed by a coalition of Conservative, Liberal, and Irish Nationalist Parties and for 24 out of the 30 years between 1915 and 1945 by a coalition of Conservatives, Labourites, and divided Liberals.

<sup>2</sup>See S. Finer, *The Changing British Party System, 1945-79*, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, 1980, p. 244, for an account of electoral support for the various parties. The National Front, for example, only won 0.6 percent of the vote in 1979.

The ability of the Liberal/SDP alliance to rise to power, however, is in serious question. The two parties share many concerns, particularly in regard to economic policy, but they have experienced difficulties in containing their natural rivalry, especially over which party will be the dominant partner. The Liberals, with a proud tradition reaching back into the nineteenth century, naturally resent the heavy media attention paid to the upstart SDP; these types of tensions would be exacerbated in an electoral campaign.

The two parties are apparently split over nuclear policy. The Liberals have traditionally questioned the need for a British nuclear capability; in 1958, for example, the Liberals adopted unilateral nuclear disarmament as party policy. A similar resolution was passed in 1981 and reaffirmed in 1982. The SDP has adopted a different stance. Although it opposes the acquisition of Trident II, it supports the maintenance of cruise missiles mounted on Royal Navy hunter-killer submarines. The SDP also favors the establishment of dual control over U.S. cruise missiles in Britain and supports the creation of a 150-km wide nuclear free zone on the German border.

In its 1983 campaign manifesto, the alliance tried to paper over its internal differences on nuclear issues by offering some imprecise proposals, including strengthening conventional forces, pursuing multilateral disarmament, and cancelling Trident II, although it did not address the issue of finding a Polaris replacement.<sup>3</sup>

Even if their substantive differences can be surmounted, the Liberal/SDP path to power is seriously blocked by Britain's unique electoral system. Unlike most other parliamentary systems, Britain allocates parliamentary seats through single member district elections rather than in close proportion to the popular vote. In each of Britain's 635 districts, whichever candidate from the contending parties secures the most votes is elected to serve in the House. This system benefits the larger and richer parties, with their powerful organizations and blanket advertising, and helps preserve the "duopoly." The Liberals are the most prominent victims of this "first past the post" voting system; in 1974, for example, the Liberals won almost 20 percent of the vote, yet secured only 2 percent of the seats in Commons. A similar outcome befell the Liberals in 1979 and the Liberal/SDP alliance in June 1983. Not surprisingly, a major policy objective of the Liberal/SDP alliance is the adoption of a proportional electoral system, but this would require the highly unlikely support of the Conservative and Labour Parties.

<sup>3</sup>*Working Together for Britain*, London, 1983.



The Conservative and Labour Parties have alternated in forming the governments that developed British nuclear policy since 1945. Labour's first postwar government took the initial decision to build the bomb and a strategic bomber force; but most of Britain's strategic and procurement decisions, such as the 1957 policy of massive retaliation and the 1962 procurement of Polaris, took place during the Conservative Party's 13-year rule from 1951 to 1964. These decisions were, in large part, adhered to by subsequent Labour and Conservative administrations and still profoundly affect Britain's nuclear force posture and strategy.

Despite the steady development of a wide array of British nuclear forces, considerable theoretical and ideological differences have separated the two parties in their approaches to nuclear policy, differences exacerbated by dissimilarities in their policymaking processes. Moreover, with the recent GLCM and Trident decisions, the uneasy bipartisan consensus on nuclear issues has now collapsed. At present, the Labour Party is committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament. The Conservatives are firmly committed to the continued maintenance of a flexible nuclear capability, the procurement of Trident II, and cruise missile deployment in Britain.

The Labour Party's present nuclear policy is the result of friction between its right and left wings, which have been divided for decades on a wide range of domestic, foreign, and defense issues. Nuclear policy, like defense policy in general, has traditionally been an uncomfortable and divisive issue for the Labour Party to address, and the sensitive nature of these matters has been exacerbated by divided and confused policymaking. These internal conflicts have led in turn to periodic shifts in Labour's nuclear policy as the party has attempted to reach a consensus: from supporting Conservative nuclear policy in 1959, to backing unilateral nuclear disarmament in 1960, to adopting a middle-ground moderate policy in 1961. Similar nuclear policy conflicts have been troubling the party in the early 1980s.

In contrast, the Conservative Party's nuclear policies have been steadfast, largely because of Britain's legacy as a former world power. The Conservative Party has never been able to embrace Britain's Eurocentric role, preferring instead the heyday of Empire. This has led to general support for nuclear forces, because these "virility symbols," as critics call them, are believed to give Britain greater international influence and independence of action. Although there is general agreement on the need for nuclear forces, internal Conservative Party conflicts do periodically take place over what percentage of Britain's

shrinking defense resources should be devoted to nuclear and what to conventional forces. In sum, the Conservatives are divided over the amount of resources that should be devoted to the nuclear deterrent, Labour over whether Britain should possess a deterrent at all.

## THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

The ruling Conservative Party is the lineal descendant of the Tory Party of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Attracting considerable financial support from business and electoral support from the professional and middle classes as well as a large portion of the working classes, the Conservative Party typically does not present dogmatic ideological positions. Instead, it trumpets vague support for such notions as patriotism, "equality of opportunity" (instead of Labour's "equality of condition"), and the strong role that private enterprise should play in economic and social policy. The Conservative Party is also the former Imperial Party, with emotional attachment to the idea that Britain should still play a powerful role in world affairs. Accordingly, it supports a strong defense establishment.

The "imperial hangover" has shaped many aspects of Conservative policy on nuclear issues, particularly in regard to the need for an "independent" British nuclear deterrent. A dominant theme running throughout Conservative Party politics has been the belief that nuclear weapons confer Great Power prestige and influence upon Britain, thus enabling British interests to be given a proper airing in superpower and NATO negotiations. Whenever Conservative governments are in office, the independence of British nuclear forces is stressed, as in Tory pronouncements regarding the Trident decision. The roles of Anglo-American dual key systems or U.S.-controlled systems based in Britain are rarely highlighted.

The Conservative Party's approach to nuclear issues has been greatly influenced by the strong pro-defense orientation of most Tory MPs, who support both an independent nuclear force and powerful conventional forces. This support, however, has fueled periodic schisms, because the increasing cost of maintaining a credible nuclear capability in a superpower world has necessarily diverted resources from Britain's conventional forces.

Periodic conflicts in Conservative thinking about nuclear forces versus conventional forces have been magnified because policy-formulating in the party is a "top down" process, dominated largely by the party leader and the parliamentary party. In making policy, the party leader enjoys a great deal of power by controlling the

appointment of the cabinet (or shadow cabinet when in opposition), the allocation of party funds, and the management and direction of the Central Office, the party's central bureaucratic organization.

The district organizations in the Conservative Party, which are known as constituency parties, have typically exercised little influence on party policy, because of both structural constraints and tradition. Although the constituency parties send delegates to the annual party conference to vote on policy issues, *the leader need not follow these guidelines*. Provided the leader and the parliamentary party, which consists of elected MPs, pay adequate verbal attention to general Tory principles, the constituency parties tend to keep a low profile on most policy questions.<sup>4</sup>

The limited power of the Conservative Party's support base enhances the position of the leader, but it also greatly magnifies the influence of MPs in the parliamentary party in the making of defense and nuclear policy. Conservative MPs choose the leader of the party, and they can always select a more popular replacement. Indeed, *every* past Conservative leader since World War II—Churchill, Eden, Macmillan, Douglas-Home, and Heath—has been replaced because of his failure to earn the continued confidence of the back-benchers. This legacy, of course, makes any Tory leader particularly sensitive to the opinions of MPs in the parliamentary party. Further, it encourages the leader to balance any cabinet with members of different ideological bents to aid consensus on policy.

On defense and nuclear policy in particular, the Conservative leader and his or her ministers have paid close attention to the mood of the back-benchers. The Conservatives traditionally support the "Pillars of the State"—the monarchy, the Church of England, and the armed services. Spending the Exchequer's funds on defense is widely supported by Tory back-benchers, who have been vociferous in castigating Labour governments that have cut defense spending to alleviate the perennial balance of payments problem.<sup>5</sup> There is a generally keen Tory interest in the precise allocation of Exchequer funds to the individual services.

<sup>4</sup>Following the disastrous election results of 1974, the constituency parties initiated attempts to participate in discussions of party policy, but were quickly dissuaded by the new leader, Margaret Thatcher. The "Iron Maiden" firmly directed the constituency organizations that their role was not to make policy, but to make money for the party's Central Office. They were also instructed to support the directives of the leadership and turn out the vote at the next election. The constituency parties have not raised their heads over the parapet since 1974. See R. Behrens, *The Conservative Party from Heath to Thatcher*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1981, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup>Typical Tory attitudes toward defense issues can be found in M. Chichester and J. Wilkinson, *The Uncertain Ally: British Defence Policy, 1960-1990*, Gower Press, London, 1982.

A Conservative government that attempts to cut defense spending or reduce a particular service's share of the budgetary pie does so in the knowledge that such activities are likely to induce strong resentment in the back-ranks, resentment fanned by the armed services, which maintain a close, although informal, relationship with the Conservative parliamentary party. *Indeed, there is a very close coincidence of views between many Conservative MPs and the services on defense and nuclear policy issues.* Many Tory MPs, like the services, want to maintain conventional forces at present or greater levels and simultaneously maintain a credible nuclear deterrent. If these capabilities cannot be supported on the current budget, a popular back-bench (and service) solution is to increase defense spending.

The pro-defense orientation of Conservative back-benchers has exerted a powerful influence on British nuclear policy. Before their electoral victory in 1951, the Conservatives strongly criticized Labour's seemingly hesitant start toward acquiring a nuclear capability. Indeed, there was great Conservative dismay when the Russians exploded their first device in 1949; the Tories had been confident that Britain would become the world's second nuclear power. Once in power, there was little internal Conservative Party disagreement about the need for Britain to acquire nuclear weapons and delivery systems; it was widely felt that a Great Power like Britain, one of the three strongest nations in the world, had to have atomic weaponry as both the symbol of and means to world power.

The 1956 Suez debacle demonstrated to many in Britain that the country was no longer a Great Power. Quite simply, because of her economic weakness, Britain was less able to exercise her power without U.S. support. This perception was very unpopular with many Conservative back-benchers.

It became difficult for the new Conservative government of Harold Macmillan to reduce defense spending, even though the perilous state of the British economy made reductions vital. Had the government acknowledged Britain's increasingly limited power by cutting back defense spending and British global commitments, a damaging and protracted Conservative Party split would probably have been the result. In part to avoid such a split, Macmillan's government enunciated the "Sandys Doctrine" of massive retaliation, by which the government was able to secure conventional force cuts through the maneuver of playing upon back-bench yearnings for world power through nuclear strength. The government stressed that an independent nuclear capability was both cheaper and more effective than expensive conventional forces. Furthermore, it ensured Great Power status. Back-bench

opposition was therefore temporarily preempted, because to many the appearance of power approached the reality. As one Conservative MP stated two years after Suez:

Britain can knock down twelve cities in the region of Stalingrad and Moscow from bases in Britain and another dozen in the Crimea from bases in Cyprus. We did not have that power at the time of Suez. We are a major power again.<sup>6</sup>

Although the 1957 Sandys White Paper was initially popular, back-bench unease grew in time over the associated cuts in conventional forces. Several MPs, including Sir Antony Head, a former Conservative Minister of Defence, stated that ending conscription and cutting the conventional forces would severely jeopardize British security. This criticism was heartily supported by the military services and grew more voluble among Conservative MPs as the credibility of massive retaliation was increasingly questioned. In reaction, the government decreased its verbal emphasis on the role of nuclear forces in subsequent Defence White Papers but still played to the back-ranks by stressing the independence of the deterrent.

The politically expedient emphasis on nuclear independence played a powerful role in the 1962 negotiations for the procurement of the Polaris system, the current backbone of the British deterrent. The abrupt American cancellation of the Skybolt air-launched missile system, which was programmed to upgrade Britain's bomber-based deterrent, caused strong anti-American feeling to develop among Conservative MPs, who believed the United States was attempting to destroy Britain's independent nuclear capability and global power. This anti-American sentiment was rendered more serious by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's precarious standing with his parliamentary party, because his administration had been rocked by a series of economic crises. Failure to reach an equitable agreement with the Americans on a successor to Skybolt might well have meant Macmillan's rapid retirement and a new anti-American Conservative regime.

Accordingly, the Prime Minister had back-bench opinion firmly in mind when he negotiated with President Kennedy at Nassau in December 1962. He also kept it fully in Kennedy's mind. When the American President reoffered Skybolt to the British, Macmillan rejected it largely because of party sentiment. How could a Great Power accept the "second-best" Skybolt system, one the Americans had canceled? It *had* to be Polaris, even though Whitehall had been pro-

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<sup>6</sup>Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*, p. 96.

claiming only a few weeks before that Skybolt was best suited to Britain's needs.

At this point, Kennedy offered Polaris to Britain provided Macmillan would accept its inclusion within the framework of a NATO multilateral force. Here the influence of the parliamentary party was in evidence once again. Had Macmillan accepted strong conditions that restricted British "independence," he probably would have been removed from power. As one editorial put it: "From the Nassau Conference room, the Prime Minister could still hear 3,000 miles away the loud baying of the Tory troops for their independent deterrent."<sup>7</sup> Macmillan could not accept strict conditions on Polaris; indeed, the cry for independence was so strong that following the Nassau Agreement the government was forced to deny rumours circulating within the parliamentary party that the Americans had insisted on a system of electronic locks before agreeing to the sale.<sup>8</sup>

The independence issue also made Conservative resistance to the American-sponsored Multilateral Force (MLF) proposal almost preordained. Not only were there strong technical and financial objections from Whitehall, but the Conservative parliamentary party viewed it as a U.S. ploy to gain control over the British deterrent. Accordingly, the government fought a delaying action against American attempts to have NATO adopt the MLF.

Nuclear issues became less important for the Conservatives following their electoral defeat in 1964. The new Labour government carried out most of the previous Conservative nuclear programs, including the continuation of the Polaris project, and in so doing evoked sardonic congratulations from the Conservative opposition benches. During the late 1960s and 1970s, moreover, there were no important nuclear issues that had to be addressed in the political party arena: Such items as Chevaline and the 1973 replacement of Honest John missiles with Lance missiles were quietly dealt with within the cloaking secrecy of Whitehall.

With the recent decisions to deploy cruise missiles in Britain and to buy Trident—decisions reaffirmed by Thatcher after the 1983 elections—nuclear issues have resurfaced in Conservative politics. In large part because of the need to maintain a united position in the House of Commons, the planned cruise missile deployments have aroused little opposition in the Conservative parliamentary party. The Trident decision, however, has generated considerable internal controversy; widespread fears have been raised that the conventional forces

<sup>7</sup>Cited in Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*, p. 235.

<sup>8</sup>For further discussion of the Skybolt affair, see R. Neustadt, *Alliance Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1970.

will suffer, just as parliamentary party opposition developed in response to the conventional cuts planned under the 1957 "Sandys Doctrine." At present, however, the fear of continuing conventional cuts has not been mollified in the Commons by the government's constant allusions to the complete independence of the British force.

To make Trident costs more manageable, parliamentary party pressure forced the government to go to rather devious lengths when cutting the Royal Navy in 1981. The Defence Secretary, John Nott, leaked rumors that massive naval cuts were in the works, even though the planned cuts were actually more modest. The Navy Minister, Keith Speed, publicly criticized the supposed government decision, prompting Thatcher to fire him. Speed appealed to the back-ranks, who announced strong opposition to the supposedly massive naval cuts. When the Defence White Paper was promulgated, the actual cuts were far more modest than had been feared. Accordingly, the back-benchers believed that they had "saved the navy," and the government managed to secure the cuts it believed necessary to procure Trident.

Tory opposition to conventional naval reductions has been growing steadily since the 1981 White Paper. In February 1982, 36 Tory back-benchers introduced a motion to increase defense spending and restore the Navy.<sup>9</sup> In reaction to the growing fears of Conservative back-benchers that the Royal Navy would suffer because of the Trident decision, John Nott issued a lengthy rebuttal stating that acquiring Trident II would not harm the services' conventional capabilities, particularly the Royal Navy's. His arguments have not proved convincing to most Tory MPs. As one back-benchers stated in *The Times*:

Of course the Secretary of State is right in saying that you must not rob one Service to pay for another. All three are vital, none more so than the Royal Navy. BAOR cannot be cut below 55,000 and the air defence of Britain must be strengthened. The Navy has to face up with its allies to the threat of the world's largest force of nuclear submarines.

There is but one answer—to spend more on defence. Not 5 percent of the GNP but 7 percent. This will result in howls from local authorities, the social services, etc., but it would be a cheap price to pay for preventing World War III.<sup>10</sup>

The pervasive influence of such attitudes in the parliamentary party played a role in the post-Falklands decision to maintain the Royal Navy at stronger levels than initially planned and also has made

<sup>9</sup>*The Times*, 26 February 1982.

<sup>10</sup>*The Times*, 2 August 1982.

possible the steady increases (in real terms) in Britain's defense budgets. In the future, such action may become more and more difficult for fiscal reasons and may spur renewed Conservative dissension on defense resource allocation and strategy.

## THE LABOUR PARTY

The Labour Party, although battered in both the May 1979 and June 1983 elections, has formed the traditional alternative to Conservative rule. Founded in 1900 by a coalition of labor unions and politically active socialist intellectuals to provide the working classes with greater political clout, the Labour Party first attained power in 1924. It is committed to Socialist principles, especially nationalization and worker control over the means of production. It draws most of its electoral support from the working classes and the bulk of its financial support from the trade union movement. Generally, the Labour Party—in and out of power—has concentrated most of its efforts on domestic economic issues.

On defense and nuclear issues, the Labour Party has often been divided. The party's vocal left-wing faction has consistently argued that defense spending, besides being morally wrong and increasing the chances of war, consumes vital financial resources that could be better used to turn Britain into a socialist state. This attitude fits in well with the strong strain of pacifism prevalent in socialist ideology. The right-wing faction, drawing support from the trade union movement and heavily represented in the parliamentary party, has tended to have a more pragmatic approach to nuclear issues. It typically has encouraged the party to concentrate on domestic economic problems, thus leaving the divisive nuclear and foreign policy problems to the leadership.

The divided nature of the Labour Party's policymaking process has fueled this left versus right split on nuclear issues. There are three main actors in Labour's general policy process: (1) the party leader and his or her parliamentary party; (2) the National Executive Council (NEC), a separate organization elected by the support base that controls the party's central bureaucracy; and (3) the annual party conference, which is dominated by the trade unions.

Under the terms of Labour's constitution, policy is initially proposed by a joint working group of the NEC and the parliamentary party. Proposals are then voted upon at the annual conference and, if ratified, emerge as party policy. Within this framework, the unions occupy a decisive position, because they control the election of a majority of the



NEC's 26 positions and also control most of the votes at party conferences.

Although the parliamentary party has little input into the decision-making process, it attempts to carry out party policies. This frequently creates friction, because on most issues the parliamentary party's approach is necessarily dominated by day-to-day political reality. A useful illustration is afforded by the words of the former head of the party, James Callaghan. He bluntly told a left-wing member of the NEC who was calling for massive tax increases to finance the nationalization of the means of production: "If you want to retain power, you've got to listen to what the people—our people—say and what they want. . . . They all want to pay less tax."<sup>11</sup>

The gap between the generally pragmatic thinking of the leaders of the parliamentary party and the more doctrinaire approach of the committed socialist wing of the party initially emerged during Labour's first government after World War II on economic and foreign policy issues. It eventually spread to embrace nuclear policy. Prime Minister Clement Attlee's cabinet was formed by men who had participated in the wartime national government. These men, dominated by the demands of international *Realpolitik*, had taken the secret decision to develop a nuclear capability and generally supported a strong defense base, a continued global and imperial role, and a close relationship with the United States.

The left wing of the party, however, had great faith in the seductive but untried theories of a "socialist foreign policy" and recoiled from the world of international power politics, which they believed had led to the two global wars. Stated simply, they believed that if Britain underwent a true socialist domestic revolution, international peace and harmony would naturally emerge. Supporters of a "socialist foreign policy" perceived the Soviet Union as a natural ally and capitalist America as a great evil.

The schism between the pragmatists, who dominated the cabinet, and the left wing, who enjoyed the sympathy of the wider support base, has never really healed on defense and other issues. During the immediate postwar years, Attlee's successful initiatives to pull the United States into the defense of Europe irritated many left wingers. As one MP of the Tribune group, an association of left-wing Labour members, complained: "It is felt that when our policy meets with such hearty approval from the Opposition, there must be something wrong with it. . . . If the Tories applaud, it cannot be a Socialist Foreign

<sup>11</sup>*The Economist*, 18 March 1978.

Policy.”<sup>12</sup> When Attlee’s cabinet decided to support the United States in the Korean conflict with a massive rearmament program, the left wing openly rebelled, claiming that the diversion of resources toward defense would destroy the chances of implementing Labour’s ambitious socialist program. The consequent internal fighting contributed greatly to Labour’s electoral loss in 1951 and made defense and nuclear issues even more sensitive in future years.

The 1951 defeat also inaugurated 13 years of wandering in the political wilderness for the Labour Party, and the unhealed internal schisms on domestic and defense issues grew as the Conservatives administered successive electoral defeats in the 1950s. During the 1950s, Britain ostensibly enjoyed bipartisan consensus on nuclear policy, since Labour’s leadership and parliamentary party supported Conservative plans to acquire nuclear weapons and delivery systems. These programs, after all, had been initiated by the Attlee government. The strategy of massive retaliation announced in 1957, however, induced some open dissatisfaction within Labour’s leadership and in the late 1950s the Labour Party leadership began to openly question Conservative policy on nuclear issues, particularly its heavy reliance on nuclear weapons and “massive retaliation” for Britain’s defense.

The left within the party, of course, had long been troubled by Conservative nuclear policy on moral and emotional grounds, claiming that possession of nuclear weapons did not strengthen Britain, but instead reduced her moral stature and spurred nuclear proliferation and the dangers of war. In 1957, for example, many left-wing Labour MPs opposed continuing British possession of nuclear weapons and sided with the newly founded mass movement, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which advocated a unilateral ban on nuclear testing. The party leadership, worried about the growing split in the party, tried to attenuate the problem by actively supporting an annual party conference resolution favoring a ban on nuclear testing.

The schism in the Labour Party, however, was not healed by this leadership action and degenerated into open warfare following the disastrous electoral defeat of 1959. It was widely felt in the right-wing, represented by Party Leader Hugh Gaitskell, that Labour had to abandon its radical, doctrinaire image if it wanted to regain power. The left strongly opposed this and proposed procedures that would enable the wider support base of the party to gain greater control over the parliamentary party. The major objective of this effort was to oust the hated right-wing “Gaitskellites.” Increasingly, nuclear issues became the

<sup>12</sup>M. Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus in Labour’s Foreign Policy, 1914–1965*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1969, p. 117.

focus for widespread debate in the party, with the left pushing harder and harder for unilateral disarmament. Still, the friction over nuclear disarmament was more a symptom than a cause of the internal dissension. The left was primarily interested in gaining greater control of the party in order to implement socialism; nuclear issues were in large part a convenient club with which to embarrass and gain ground on the "traitorous" leadership.

The left-wing of the party, aided by growing support for unilateral disarmament in the unions, strongly backed the policies of the CND, which had moved from its initial opposition to testing to opposition to any defense policy based on nuclear weapons. The left now advocated unilateral British nuclear disarmament and an end to American bases in Britain; and some members even supported withdrawal from NATO, with its "immoral" reliance on nuclear weaponry.

In reaction, Gaitskell attempted to heal differences by proposing a new party nuclear policy at the 1960 Labour conference in Scarborough. The Conservative government's recent cancellation of the Blue Streak IRBM provided Gaitskell with a useful weapon to criticize the current government. In conjunction with the Trade Union Council (TUC), Gaitskell introduced a resolution calling for a unilateral end to testing, the removal of U.S. Thor missile bases in Britain, and a review of NATO strategy that called for an end to the doctrine of "massive retaliation." The document also ambiguously stated: "The Blue Streak fiasco has shown that Britain cannot maintain herself as an independent nuclear power. In the future the provision of the thermonuclear deterrent must be left to the U.S.A."<sup>13</sup> To further complicate matters, however, Labour also called for effective NATO control over the use of American nuclear weapons.

This ambiguous policy statement failed to answer several questions and was harshly criticized by the press and the Conservatives. Would Britain under Labour scrap all her bombs, or instead become a "dependent" nuclear power? Would other U.S. nuclear systems based in Britain be removed? How would NATO secure control over American systems? These questions were unanswered, with the right believing one thing and the left another. Nevertheless, Gaitskell's initiative did demonstrate how the leadership had moved to create a greater party consensus on nuclear policy.

In order to become policy, the resolution had to be ratified at the party conference. In this, Gaitskell failed. The left wing of the party—some unions, CND members, constituency parties, and aligned

<sup>13</sup>*Foreign Policy and Defence*, Transport House, London, 1960.

MPs—resisted Gaitskell's ambiguous but seemingly accommodating efforts. Instead, it passed a resolution calling for unilateral nuclear disarmament. It also opposed "any defence policy based on the threat of use of strategic or tactical nuclear weapons."<sup>14</sup> Such a policy, if implemented, would probably have forced Britain to leave NATO, although this issue was avoided at the party conference. As a result, Labour's leadership and much of its parliamentary party were placed in the uncomfortable position of opposing the declared nuclear policy of the party; the fervent hope of the many leftists was that Gaitskell and his associates would resign.<sup>15</sup>

Instead, Gaitskell and his supporters decided to fight back and, at the 1961 party conference, the crucial union vote swung against unilateralism and in favor of a vague nuclear policy resolution similar to the one proposed by Gaitskell in 1960.<sup>16</sup> The leadership's victory triggered further bitterness and fragmentation among the party's leftists, who became somewhat more extreme in their statements. In general, the bulk of the party was tired of this internecine warfare on nuclear issues, particularly because a new election was looming. It was unclear, after the 1961 party conference, what a new Labour government might do concerning nuclear weapons.

In the buildup to the 1964 election, the Conservative Party attempted to exacerbate tensions in the Labour movement by stressing the Tory commitment to nuclear independence. Labour was portrayed as the party that would give up the Polaris deterrent, thus risking the very existence of the nation. The new Labour leader, Harold Wilson, who took over after Gaitskell's untimely death in 1963, preferred to sidestep the issue completely and laid greatest stress on economic issues. What limited public Labour discussion of nuclear affairs took place generally involved criticism of Britain's nuclear "independence." Labour's official nuclear policy election plank was in fact a masterpiece of obfuscation:

Polaris . . . will not be independent and it will not be British and it will not deter. Its possession will impress neither friend nor foe. Moreover, Britain's insistence on nuclear pretence carries with it grave dangers of encouraging the spread of nuclear weapons to countries not possessing them, including Germany. . . . The Nassau Agreement to buy Polaris know-how and Polaris missiles from the U.S.A. will add nothing to the deterrent strength of the Western Alliance. . . . We are not prepared any longer to waste the country's

<sup>14</sup>Groom, 1974, p. 431.

<sup>15</sup>Williams, 1979, pp. 610–613.

<sup>16</sup>DeWeerd, 1962, p. 15.

resources on endless duplication of strategic nuclear weapons. We shall propose the re-negotiation of the Nassau agreement. Our stress will be on the strengthening of our conventional forces.<sup>17</sup>

The Conservative ploy failed to split Labour, which narrowly won the 1964 campaign. However, the new Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, was immediately faced with two complex and related nuclear issues: the future of the Polaris force and the U.S. proposal favoring the creation of a Multilateral Force (MLF). Wilson's approach to both problems was influenced by the latent split within the party on nuclear issues and he was extremely careful not to alienate either the left or the right. In this, he was aided by Labour's precarious three vote majority in Commons; any rebellion within the parliamentary party would have triggered the downfall of the new government. The right of the party held the majority of cabinet appointments, but to aid consensus, Wilson prudently gave the three major left-wing leaders of the parliamentary party cabinet appointments in the domestic area. This had the effect of co-opting these leftwing ministers on nuclear policy, because they would have had to resign to oppose the government.

After some study while in office, Wilson decided to proceed with Polaris. Concern for maintaining a "special relationship" with the United States, China's highly publicized nuclear test one day after the British election, and the "bargain" price of the highly sophisticated system all played a role in government thinking. Wilson's memoirs, however, were characteristically vague in regard to this critical decision:

It was clear that the production of the submarines was well past the point of no return; there could be no question of cancelling them, except at inordinate cost. We decided to go ahead with four of the proposed five submarines, and to ensure their deployment as a fully committed part of the NATO defence force. There was to be no nuclear pretence or suggestion of a go-it-alone British nuclear war against the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, the MLF proposal had to be addressed. The Labour Party had vigorously opposed the notion of an MLF from the obscurity of the opposition back-benches since the idea had first been broached, largely because of residual anti-German sentiment. It now had to deal with the issue as a government. Wilson traveled to Washington in December 1964 and, as a bargaining and delaying ploy, offered a new proposal to President Johnson—the Atlantic Nuclear

<sup>17</sup>*Let's Go with Labour for a New Britain*, Transport House, London, 1964.

<sup>18</sup>Wilson, 1971, p. 40.

Force (ANF). This new force was to be composed of Britain's V-bombers and Polaris submarines, an equal number of U.S. SLBMs, whatever forces France wished to contribute, and some mixed-man aircraft or missiles. Britain's proposal of an ANF, in combination with strong French opposition to MLF, further undermined support for the idea of a multinational nuclear force, which over time sank into obscurity.

Wilson announced the delicate decision to proceed with Polaris in January 1965. The "bargain" price, the number of new jobs, the commitment of the force to NATO, and the need for good relations with the United States were all stressed. Labour's left wing was not pleased, but acquiesced to this "renegotiation of Nassau," knowing that any overt opposition would have caused the fall of the government. Vociferous left-wing dissatisfaction over this nuclear issue was also attenuated by Wilson's vigorous subsequent cutbacks in both conventional arms expenditure and Britain's global commitments.

In subsequent years, Labour governments, strongly aware of the sensitivity of nuclear matters within the party, have generally avoided publicly emphasizing nuclear issues. Little public attention, for example, was drawn to the NATO policy of flexible response adopted in 1967; indeed, not until 1976 did Labour provide an explanation of what the new policy involved. The 1974-1979 Wilson and Callaghan administrations preferred not to let it be known publicly that they had continued full funding for the secret Chevaline penetrating warhead and permitted an increase in the size of the British-based American F-111 force in 1976, for fear of fueling renewed internal party warfare. And similar fears led the Callaghan government not to encourage public discussion of the sensitive but critical issue of a replacement for the aging Polaris submarines, although some high-level internal discussions were apparently initiated to examine possible options.

During the period from the Polaris and MLF decisions to the late 1970s, there was little Labour Party discussion of nuclear issues. When Labour was in office (1964 to 1970, 1974 to 1979), the leadership, for reasons of party cohesion, kept nuclear issues off the front burner of the party's policy agenda. And when Labour was out of power (1970 to 1974), there were no important nuclear policy issues on which the opposition cared to focus its criticism, because nuclear affairs were generally more divisive to Labour than they were to the Conservatives.

With the cruise missile and Trident decisions, nuclear issues have resurfaced for Labour with a vengeance. As in other nuclear policy problems, these frictions are a symptom of left versus right infighting

over a wide range of issues. The perennial gap between left and right that has now spread to embrace nuclear policy surfaced frequently in public during the last Labour government. Prime Minister Callaghan's government was heavily dominated by the right wing and its moderate policies irritated many left wingers. Labour's disastrous 1979 defeat was then used to discredit the "bankrupt" policies of the right. Since 1979, the left wing has managed to increase its strength considerably in the National Executive Council, in the executives of many unions, and in the constituency parties. Indeed, the party's general political complexion has changed so much that Michael Foot, the Labour Party leader who replaced Callaghan in 1980, is regarded in many circles as a moderate Socialist, even though during the 1950s through 1970s he was perceived as a radical firebrand. The shift to the left has also caused the unprecedented defection of four former Labour cabinet ministers to form the SDP.

The left's growing strength has enabled it to pass a number of procedural changes in the party's policymaking structure. First, the leader is now elected by the conference, rather than the parliamentary party, a procedural change that enabled Foot to attain power. Second, all MPs must now be reselected during their term in Parliament by their local constituency parties. The latter are precisely the organizations where the left has grown most powerful.<sup>19</sup> Many Labour moderates, such as Fred Mulley, the former Labour Defence Secretary, and the former Labour House Speaker, who compared his constituency party to a "local Mafia," have failed to earn reselection.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, several left (and hard left) candidates have been chosen to run for several parliamentary seats; the future of many moderate and right-wing MPs will be in jeopardy before the next election unless they support declared party policy. Because of the new reselection process, the wider support base of the Labour Party has achieved greater control over the activities of the parliamentary party, which previously enjoyed independence and typically has been pragmatic in outlook.

The growing power of the left has made internal Labour friction over the cruise and Trident issues almost preordained. The right wing has strongly criticized Trident as being too expensive and somewhat reluctantly criticized GLCMs as vulnerable,<sup>21</sup> but it supports a cheaper successor for Polaris (such as sea- or bomber-launched cruise missiles), the continued presence of U.S. bases in Britain, and a strong British

<sup>19</sup>For an analysis of the left's tactics, see David and Maurice Kogan, *The Battle for the Labour Party*, Fontana, London, 1982.

<sup>20</sup>*The Guardian*, 3 August 1982.

<sup>21</sup>See "Healey's Case Against Cruise," *The Economist*, 26 February 1983, p. 61.

role in NATO. The right's policies, however, have failed to stem the anti-nuclear tide in the party. In July 1980, the National Executive Council voted to support the rapidly growing Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and over 25 percent of the 500 resolutions proposed for the annual party conference dealt with nuclear weapons.<sup>22</sup> At the 1980 Labour Conference, the left gained enough support from the unions to narrowly pass a resolution calling for unilateral nuclear disarmament; a similar resolution was passed in 1981. At the 1982 conference, Labour's anti-nuclear stance was spelled out in greater detail. In a resolution passed by more than two thirds of the delegates, the party officially supported:

Opposing, unconditionally, the replacement of Polaris by Trident or any other system, and the deployment of cruise missiles, neutron bombs and all other nuclear weapons in Britain. . . .

Closing down all nuclear bases, British or American, on British soil or in British waters.<sup>23</sup>

The 1982 party conference also voted to reduce the percentage of GNP devoted to defense, but rejected radical calls for a withdrawal from NATO.

This unilateralist policy was further refined in the party's election manifesto from the 1983 elections. The document states that although Labour believes in "collective security," it rejects "the present emphasis on nuclear weapons." Accordingly, Labour would cancel Trident, refuse cruise missile deployments, and pursue the removal of all nuclear weapons systems off British soil within the lifetime of the next Parliament. Labour also pledged that Britain and her allies in NATO should have "sufficient military strength to discourage external aggression and defend themselves if attacked," but Labour would also reduce the proportion Britain spends on defense to bring it more into line with those of other Western European nations.

The promulgation of this manifesto has failed to quell Labour Party friction over nuclear policy, which surfaced both during and after the June 1983 elections. Denis Healey, the party's deputy leader, stated in May that the manifesto was not unilateralist and only meant that Britain's Polaris force would be included in future arms negotiations

<sup>22</sup>*The Economist*, 26 July 1980.

<sup>23</sup>*The Times*, 30 September 1982. It should be noted that the resolution also applies to the British base of Diego Garcia. Considerable controversy erupted in the Labour Party after it was discovered that the island had been used as a staging area for the Iranian hostage rescue attempt, and many Labourites have publicly queried whether U.S. nuclear weapons were stored on the island.



and abandoned only if the Soviet Union proved accommodating. Former Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan concurrently attacked the manifesto, leaving Party Leader Michael Foot in a rather awkward and unresolved situation with regard to nuclear issues, among others.

Following the unsuccessful election campaign, friction over nuclear policy has continued to plague the Labour Party. Foot announced his plans to retire, and disagreement over nuclear issues characterized the campaign for party leadership. Roy Hattersley, the leading candidate from the center, declared that Labour's radical economic and defense policies were responsible for its electoral defeat. He noted that the voters rejected "the notion that we might give up our nuclear protection if others did not do the same."<sup>24</sup> The right wing of the party often cites polls showing that between 66 and 75 percent of the British public rejects unilateralism. Neil Kinnock, the candidate from the party's left wing who won the election for party leader, strongly supported the 1983 election manifesto and Labour's current anti-nuclear policies in general. Friction over this issue will very likely continue to plague the party for many years to come.

In the past, the Labour Party has strongly criticized Tory nuclear policy from the safety of the opposition back benches, but when in power it has continued its predecessor's policies. The chances are limited that anything similar will take place in the near term should Labour attain power. The left wing has attained a much stronger grip on the activities of the parliamentary party through procedural and structural changes, and right-wing attempts to reverse the tide have largely failed. Unless the right wing of the party greatly increases its power in coming years—possibly by blaming Labour's 1983 defeat and continued low standing in the polls on the doctrinaire policies of the left—the policies of unilateral nuclear disarmament and the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from British soil may indeed be implemented should Labour come to power.

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<sup>24</sup>*The Times*, 19 July 1983.

#### IV. TRADE UNIONS, THE CAMPAIGN FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT, AND THE MEDIA

Although the executive branch, manned by an experienced and powerful civil service, has played a dominant role in nuclear issues, other actors have also influenced British nuclear policy. Political parties have helped to shape the environment within which the executive branch has operated on nuclear issues and, at times, have greatly affected the general orientation of a given administration toward nuclear policy. Two other nongovernmental actors have played important roles with respect to nuclear policy questions in Britain and are likely to continue to do so in the future. Both the trade unions and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament exert influence mainly through the Labour Party. The media have also influenced British nuclear policy but much less so than in the United States.

##### TRADE UNIONS

Drawing a distinction between political parties and a pressure group such as trade unions is somewhat artificial in the context of the British Labour Party, for the party tends to act and think of itself as one wing of the labor movement. This is traceable, in part, to the origins of the Labour Party, wherein, to use the colorful phrase of former Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, the party grew out of the "bowels" of the trade union movement. It is also related to the fact that the trade unions provide 90 percent of the party's finances and represent a bloc of between 5-6 million votes at any given annual Labour Party Conference. Comprising ten out of eleven votes at a party conference, this bloc, *if united*, is able to determine the character of the party's National Executive Committee, the choice of party leader, and the nature of the party platform.

The trade unions have periodically exercised an important influence on the course of British nuclear policy. Typically acting through the General Council of the Trade Unions Congress (TUC) and the annual party conference rather than through their delegates to the National Executive Committee, the trade unions have from time to time attempted to shape, and at times alter, Labour nuclear policy. For

example, several union leaders and rank-and-file union members had serious reservations about Britain's decision to pursue an independent nuclear deterrent in the late 1940s, and at various times (e.g., in 1952 concerning the decision to build an H-bomb) publicly criticized government thinking and policy regarding nuclear weapons. However, most trade unionists during this period put a higher priority on Britain's domestic economic policies. This in turn led them either to ignore or acquiesce in government nuclear policy during most of the late 1940s and 1950s as the British economy tried to recover from the devastation incurred during World War II.

Moreover, during the 1950s, trade union dissent from government nuclear policies—whether regarding the Labour government of 1945–51 or Conservative rule during the rest of the decade—came from only a small portion of the labor movement. These dissenters, typically belonging to the leadership rather than to the rank and file and associated with the left-wing Bevanite faction, challenged the whole notion of defense by nuclear deterrence. For them, in A.J.R. Groom's words, “the bomb’ was one symbol of their disgust for the grey, shabby, and dangerous world that they were inheriting from the preceding generation.”<sup>1</sup> They further argued that developing an independent nuclear deterrent and improved conventional forces could come only at the expense of a healthy domestic economy and a just socialist society.

Differences on nuclear policy issues began to surface more visibly and more frequently within the labor movement in the late 1950s, following Suez and the 1957 enunciation of the doctrine of massive retaliation. Hugh Gaitskell was a strong proponent of arms control and actively supported multilateral efforts to stop nuclear testing and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. He was not, however, favorably disposed toward unilateral disarmament initiatives and believed that an independent British deterrent was needed to avoid excessive British dependence on the United States. Others in Labour, reflecting the diversity of views held in different parts of the trade union movement, held different views. Some, such as R.H.S. Crossman, one of the few Labour leaders who concentrated on defense issues, argued that Britain's deterrent force had little influence on the United States and was an inherently destabilizing force in world politics. They argued that because the British nuclear force was not large enough to be a workable independent deterrent, it should be relinquished in a nonproliferation agreement with other NATO countries apart from the United States. Others emphasized the need for Britain to be able to face the

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<sup>1</sup>Groom, *British Thinking about Nuclear Weapons*, p. 145.

Soviet Union with conventional forces and argued for increased conventional defense expenditures as there was probably no safety for Britain "in trying to contract out of a world war."<sup>2</sup>

By the late 1950s, a growing number of trade unionists—particularly among the leadership of the transport and general workers, the amalgamated engineers, and the boilermakers—were leaning toward unilateral disarmament. They believed that Britain ought to take the lead in world disarmament efforts. Aneurau Bevan argued, for example, that Britain's government should tell the world:

We can make the H-bomb, but we are not going to make it. We believe that what the human race needs is leadership in the opposite direction and we are going to give it. We are going to prove there are influences and principles in the world that rise superior to those that attach still to the story of barbarism. . . . I believe that if we could say and do that, tens of millions all over the world would once more lift their eyes toward Britain.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, in 1957–1958, union backing for unilateral disarmament was still in the minority. Even the leftist Electrical Trade Union continued to oppose the unilateralists' efforts and backed the more pragmatic right-wing National Executive Committee at the 1957 annual meeting of the Trade Union Congress and at the subsequent annual Labour Party meeting.

Fending off anti-nuclear efforts during the 1957–1959 period was a coalition of forces made up of Labour Party Leader Gaitskell and his followers and a majority of trade unionists, among others. The so-called "Gaitskellites" defended Britain's nuclear deterrent on the same political grounds that the Conservatives did: Possession of the force bestowed prestige and influence. They also argued that serious divisions within the party over nuclear issues were avoidable and would only keep the Conservatives in power at the next election. The trade unionists were clearly not united about nuclear issues. Polls showed that a majority of rank-and-file members believed that TUC concern over defense issues was "improper" and that nuclear policies were legitimately the responsibility of the government and the political parties. A majority of unionists also believed that the TUC's preeminent concern should be "trade unionism."<sup>4</sup>

The cancellation of the Blue Streak ballistic missile project and the anti-nuclear activism of union leader Frank Cousins combined in 1960

<sup>2</sup>See John Straker, *The End of Empire*, Gollancz, London, 1959.

<sup>3</sup>*The Times*, 8 May 1957.

<sup>4</sup>William Snyder, *The Politics of British Defense Policy, 1945–62*, pp. 60–62.

to turn the labor movement and the Labour Party around on nuclear policy. The Blue Streak project, in progress for much of the late 1950s, was abruptly canceled in early 1960 because of its vulnerability and escalating costs, and the availability of a cheap alternative in Skybolt, an air-launched missile system then under development by the United States.

The decision to cancel Blue Streak marked the end of Britain's technical and financial capability to build an independent, credible delivery system. Labour Party leaders conceded that it was no longer certain that an independent British nuclear deterrent force was feasible at a reasonable cost, thus undercutting the major premise of Gaitskell's pro-deterrent arguments and fueling the stance of anti-nuclear elements within the party.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the unionist elements within the Labour Party, led by the rank and file, would probably have remained detached from the divisive party debate on nuclear policy in the late 1950s had it not been for the vigorous anti-nuclear efforts of Frank Cousins, the general Secretary of the mammoth Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU). After Labour suffered its third successive defeat in the 1959 general elections, tensions between the left and the right within the party intensified. The left, increasingly concerned about the course of British nuclear policy and dissatisfied with Gaitskell's leadership on many issues, decided to mount a major campaign to commit the party to unilateral disarmament.

As a way to take a stand on an issue about which he personally felt passionately and also to make Gaitskell's continuation as party leader very difficult, Cousins actively and openly sided with the left on the unilateral disarmament issue.<sup>6</sup> Cousins opted to introduce a unilateral disarmament resolution at a badly divided September 1960 meeting of the TUC and then proceeded to lobby vigorously in its behalf. Cousins's resolution was ultimately adopted after a bitter intra-TUC fight.

Cousins then introduced a similar comprehensive unilateral disarmament resolution at the 1960 annual Labour Party conference. His resolution called for "a complete rejection of any defense policy based on the threat of the use of strategic nuclear weapons." Other clauses in the resolution called for a permanent end to the manufacture and testing of nuclear weapons, a termination of aircraft carrying nuclear

<sup>5</sup>Pierre, p. 201.

<sup>6</sup>For discussion of this point and Cousins's thinking about nuclear issues, see Geoffrey Goodman, *The Awkward Warrior: Frank Cousins*, Davis-Poynter, London, 1979, pp. 293-301.

weapons operating out of bases in the United Kingdom, and opposition to the presence of missile bases in the United Kingdom.<sup>7</sup> After an intensive lobbying campaign by Cousins and the TUC on one side, Gaitskell and his followers on the other, and many of the party's parliamentary leaders trying to conciliate, the party conference endorsed Cousins's resolution by a vote of 3,282,000–3,239,000.<sup>8</sup> Cousins and his fellow unionists had narrowly won. They had put Labour publicly on record in support of unilateral disarmament. In so doing, they had also seriously undercut Gaitskell's leadership position in the party. Gaitskell, on his part, instead of yielding party leadership to the unionists, vowed to stay in power and fight the unions and the unilateral disarmament initiative, which he felt in time would doom the party. He also felt that the Conservative government deserved Labour Party support for multilateral efforts to limit nuclear arms. As Groom has noted, it certainly was an unusual situation in which the Labour Party found itself after its 1960 annual party conference:

For years the Labour Party leadership has been able to control the party by reliance on the bloc votes of the unions, which were normally 'moderates.' Now the tables were turned as the principal supporters of the leadership had deserted it. By a brilliant campaign the unilateralists (led by Frank Cousins) had succeeded in disrupting the Party's behavioral pattern.<sup>9</sup>

And subsequent empirical studies have shown that despite the strong union vote at the 1960 conference in favor of the unilateral disarmament resolution, a majority of the Labour Party at the constituency level supported Gaitskell's defense policy.<sup>10</sup>

Following the 1960 annual party meeting, Gaitskell and his supporters set out to educate and organize party members—unionists and nonunionists alike—about nuclear policy issues. The Campaign for Democratic Socialism, a pressure group against unilateral disarmament, was set up to counter unionist unilateral disarmament efforts and similar initiatives by such groups as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In addition, "cell" groups were locally organized so that anti-unilateral disarmers would have local platforms on which to state their case. Massive Labour publicity efforts were also undertaken across the United Kingdom in behalf of multilateral arms control.

<sup>7</sup>*Report of the Fifty-Ninth Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup>Harrison, 1960, p. 237.

<sup>9</sup>Groom, *British Thinking about Nuclear Weapons*, p. 430.

<sup>10</sup>Keith Hindell and Philip Williams, "Scarborough and Blackpool," *Political Quarterly*, July-September 1962, pp. 306–320.

Ultimately, Gaitskell and his followers triumphed. At the 1961 annual party conference at Blackpool, the Labour Party reversed itself on unilateralism. Over the strenuous objections of Cousins and several other union leaders, the conference approved a defense statement—"Policy for Peace"—that closely paralleled Gaitskell's position on nuclear issues. It criticized the Conservatives' emphasis on nuclear weapons. It encouraged the negotiation of multilateral arms control agreements. And it questioned the Conservatives' continuing emphasis on the "independence" of the British deterrent. The conference also passed a resolution, strongly supported by several trade union leaders but opposed by the parliamentary leadership, condemning the establishment of an American Polaris submarine base at Holy Loch.

Having been defeated at the 1961 party conference and outmaneuvered by Gaitskell among Labour's grassroots, Cousins and several other trade union leaders thereafter chose to direct their attention to the traditional primary objective of the unions' rank and file: domestic issues. Various successive Labour Party leaders were, of course, pleased by this refocusing of labor attention. Party leaders, necessarily pragmatic, typically felt that strong labor union interest in nuclear issues only undermined party unity and jeopardized Labour's electoral prospects. Both sides, in short, chose to make peace on the nuclear issue. And as a consequence of both labor leaders' concentrating their attention primarily on economic issues and party leaders' choosing not to discuss nuclear policy issues publicly, the rest of the 1960s and most of the 1970s were not characterized by great union interest in nuclear policy issues.

In the period since the Callaghan government turned over the reins of power to the Conservative Thatcher government in 1979, leftist elements within the trade union movement and also the Labour Party have been increasingly involved and influential on a range of defense issues, including nuclear ones. The decisions to deploy cruise missiles in Britain and to procure Trident combined with the Thatcher government's generally anti-union, pro-defense policies—all have served to move the unions to the left on nuclear and other issues during the past three years. At the annual party conferences in 1980 and 1981, unilateral nuclear disarmament resolutions garnered a majority of the votes but failed to get the two-thirds majority needed to insure inclusion in the official program from which the party's election platform will be drawn up.

At the 1982 annual party conference, however, the left within the party succeeded in getting an overwhelming vote for unilateralism. In part, this was because of increasing disillusionment with the policies of

the Thatcher government. In part, it was caused by growing concern about British nuclear policies and the course of American-Soviet relations. In any case, 72 percent of the delegates, many of whom came from the National Union of Mineworkers and the Electrical Workers, voted for the abolition of Britain's nuclear weapons, the repudiation of previous British commitments to station cruise missiles in Britain as well as other nuclear weapons systems with American crews, and substantial reductions in defense spending. However, a resolution demanding the withdrawal of Britain from NATO was rejected.

The leadership of two powerful unions—the General and Municipal Workers and the Engineering Workers—actively opposed this and other resolutions concerning nuclear policy, but their efforts to defeat the unilateral disarmament resolutions failed to persuade the majority of the delegates to the conference—union leaders, union rank and file, and nonunionists alike. Indeed, the vote total, reflecting a complex system of balloting to represent trade unions and local party organizations, was 4,927,000 in favor of unilateral disarmament and 1,975,000 opposed, a substantial increase over the simple majority vote on similar resolutions in the past two years.

At the 1982 conference, Party Leader Michael Foot told the delegates, among other things, that he continued to be a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and that “the greatest task that this movement will ever have to undertake is to carry out our policy for securing nuclear disarmament in this country and throughout the world.”<sup>11</sup>

## THE CAMPAIGN FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

The rise of the CND made Britain the first nuclear power to experience the growth of a powerful nationwide anti-nuclear movement. Founded in the late 1950s, the CND advocated unilateral British nuclear disarmament as well as withdrawal from NATO. It reached the height of its powers in 1960–1961, only to disintegrate over the next few years into squabbling and ineffective factions. Since 1979, however, the seemingly moribund CND has enjoyed a new lease on life, as witnessed by a dramatic rise in membership and numerous demonstrations protesting present British and NATO nuclear policy.

The growth and subsequent collapse of the CND in the late 1950s and early 1960s has a great deal of importance for the future influence of the movement on present and future British nuclear policy. As in

<sup>11</sup>*The Economist*, 2–8 October 1982, p. 61.



the past, the movement's leadership generally comes from academia, the churches, and the left wing of the Labour Party, and most of the support base comes from the increasingly alienated young. Virtually all of the present CND leadership participated in the earlier campaigns two decades ago and advocate similar political tactics. To attract public attention and support, the present movement, like its precursor, stages mass marches, pamphlet campaigns, and sit-down protests outside nuclear bases and Parliament. To implement its declared policy of unilateral British nuclear disarmament, the current CND, like the past CND, is dependent upon maintaining the sympathy of the Labour Party and its powerful unions. All in all, the current movement is a nongovernmental, extra-parliamentary organization that, like its precursor, has successfully focused Labour Party and public attention on nuclear policy issues.

The British anti-nuclear movement first emerged in the mid-1950s following the widely publicized radiation deaths of some Japanese fishermen after the American H-bomb tests in the Pacific and increasing public awareness of the hazards of radioactive debris. A group of intellectuals formed an organization to stop testing, known as the National Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Testing (NCANWT). At the same time, a group of radical socialists founded a group called the Direct Action Committee (DAC), which opposed both the testing and production of British nuclear weaponry.

In early 1958, NCANWT changed its name to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and issued a broad policy statement during an anti-nuclear demonstration outside Parliament. The CND demanded a ban on testing, an end to the establishment of new nuclear bases, and the termination of flights by nuclear-laden bombers from British airfields.

Over the next two years, the CND's policies, drawn up under the intellectual leadership of such men as philosopher Bertrand Russell and Canon L. J. Collins, evolved from focusing attention on an end to nuclear testing to opposing a British nuclear force. A strong moral revulsion concerning nuclear and other defense matters pervaded the thinking of most CND members. Fully 70 percent of those members polled, for example, believed nuclear weapons were "fundamentally evil,"<sup>12</sup> and there was little interest in the nuances of nuclear strategy. By 1960, CND policy evolved to embrace unilateral British nuclear

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<sup>12</sup>F. Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, Praeger, New York, 1968, p. 44.

disarmament and withdrawal from NATO, because the Alliance's defense policy was based on the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>13</sup>

To publicize its policies, the CND joined with the DAC in a series of annual Easter marches between Aldermaston, the central British nuclear weapons research center, and London. The first 60-mile march in 1958 attracted roughly 5000 people, but by 1960, the third Aldermaston pilgrimage drew over 100,000 people to Trafalgar Square. The explosive growth of the movement, aided by extensive distribution of pamphlets and massive petitioning drives, surprised most observers. The reasons for the expansion were diverse: a profound moral revulsion against nuclear weapons, exacerbated by a Conservative nuclear policy that emphasized massive retaliation; a nationalistic feeling that Britain, although no longer a world power, could contribute to world peace through the example of unilateral nuclear disarmament; fear of nuclear war in the tense international climate; and general alienation of youth and the young middle class from the political system.

The CND initially drew most of its support from the generation born just before or during World War II—fully 83 percent of active CND participants were young, politically active white collar members of the middle class. Only 12 percent were manual workers.<sup>14</sup> Within a few years, however, the average age of a majority of the marchers grew even younger. The CND also attracted more radical elements, such as the Communist Party and the Workers Revolutionary Party, who wished to exploit the movement to bring down the capitalist state. The radical elements joined with the DAC in advocating a massive campaign of civil disobedience, "voters' vetos,"<sup>15</sup> and direct action against nuclear sites, such as persuading workers at British and American bases to engage in sabotage or strikes.

These radical initiatives alienated many of the more moderate CND members, who wished to operate within the parliamentary system to bring about unilateral nuclear disarmament. The moderates within the CND believed that the only way to attain their disarmament objectives was to gain the support of the Labour Party. In this, as has been seen, the CND was temporarily successful. Aided by the lobbying efforts of the CND, the left within Labour persuaded enough unions to pass a resolution calling for unilateral British nuclear disarmament at the 1960 Labour Party Conference. That was the high point for the CND until recently, because growing internal tensions in the movement

<sup>13</sup>For an account of the development of CND's policies, see H. Bull, "The Many Sides of British Unilateralism," *The Reporter*, 16 March 1961.

<sup>14</sup>Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup>CND supporters were urged to spoil their ballots in protest.

rapidly undermined its cohesiveness. The CND's leadership argued that Labour had not gone far enough in its 1960 policy statement, given the party's failure to vote for British withdrawal from NATO and its "immoral" reliance on nuclear weapons. The leadership then split into several factions, as Bertrand Russell formed a new group in 1960 called the *Committee of 100* to initiate a massive campaign of civil disobedience to change government nuclear policy. Russell joined with the radical elements in the CND in an attempt to "overcrowd the jails" and ultimately force nuclear disarmament. After a few arrests, Russell's campaign fizzled out and further divided the CND. Finally, the 1961 Labour reversal of its unilateralist declaration fragmented the movement further, as many supporters felt betrayed and used.

Over the next few years the crowds involved in the Aldermaston marches grew much smaller until active CND membership stood at only 3000. Many of the activists involved drifted away to direct their attention toward social issues and American involvement in Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> In an internal post mortem of the movement's decline, the CND itself identified its major problems: internal fragmentation; the lack of tangible, clear-cut success; the 1961 Labour "betrayal"; and the difficulty of maintaining the momentum of a political movement based mainly on fear and emotion.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, a cadre still remained to join in small protests against, for example, the launching of Polaris submarines; this small group coordinated the phoenix-like rise of the CND following the December 1979 GLCM deployment decision and the January 1980 decision to procure Trident I. These events, coupled with the tense international atmosphere resulting from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian crisis, as well as the widely publicized accidental American strategic alerts and programmed nuclear strategic buildup, triggered widespread fears in Britain about the possibility of war. In February 1980, the television show *Panorama* examined the state of Britain's civil defense program, which prompted widespread alarm about the aftermath of a nuclear exchange. To alleviate criticism, the government published a civil defense handbook entitled *Protect and Survive*, but this had the effect of heightening, instead of dampening, public concern. In response to the government pamphlet, a veteran campaigner of the CND, Marxist historian E. P. Thompson, issued an instantly popular pamphlet titled *Protest and Survive*, which depicted

<sup>16</sup>J. Minion and P. Bolsover (eds.), *The CND Story*, Allison & Busby, Ltd., London, 1983, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup>See N. Young, *An Infantile Disorder? The Rise and Decline of the New Left*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1977, p. 73.

present British and NATO nuclear policy as leading inevitably to nuclear war. Thompson's policy recommendations, however, were vague and entirely negative:

We must detach ourselves from the nuclear strategies of NATO and dispense with the expensive and futile imperial toy of an independent deterrent. . . . We must close down those airfields and bases which service aircraft and submarines on nuclear missions. And we must contest every stage of the attempt to place United States cruise missiles on our soil.<sup>18</sup>

Thompson's initiatives on behalf of the CND and unilateral disarmament have been aided by several other factors. First, there has been growing criticism of NATO nuclear policy in several Western European countries. The CND was thus able to gain ideas, form links, and participate in meetings and rallies with these new anti-nuclear groups. Together, these groups have gained a certain public visibility and legitimacy and have formed the European Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Second, strong criticism has arisen in Britain over the Trident and cruise missile decisions. Such prestigious thinkers as former Army Chief of Staff Lord Carver and former Chief Scientific Advisor to the government Lord Zuckerman have joined the critics. These men and others, articulate and knowledgeable in nuclear affairs, have generally advocated greater emphasis on conventional than on nuclear forces. The CND has seized upon their criticism and gained new respectability in the public mind by their association with these more sophisticated criticisms of British policy. However, there is still a strong pacifist and anti-defense influence in the movement, and this creates tensions in the CND regarding the need for a conventional buildup. Third, the harsh economic climate in Britain and other advanced industrial nations has led many people to question the wisdom of spending several billion pounds on nuclear systems at a time of general recession. Finally, the CND gained the active support of the Labour Party in June 1980, which legitimized, inspired, and breathed new life into the movement.

Within a year of the presentation of Thompson's pamphlet, official CND membership jumped from 3000 to 15,000.<sup>19</sup> National membership stands at roughly 50,000 in 1983. In October 1981, 250,000 people marched through London in support of unilateral nuclear disarmament; in June 1982, roughly the same number of people converged on Hyde

<sup>18</sup>E. Thompson, *Protest and Survive*, Penguin Books, London, 1980.

<sup>19</sup>*The Economist*, 31 January 1981, p. 39.

Park to support unilateral disarmament.<sup>20</sup> These two protests, inspired and organized by the CND, were the largest mass demonstrations ever to have taken place in Britain.

The size of these demonstrations is not an accurate reflection of the movement's size, for the polls consistently show that the CND enjoys the support of only about 20 percent of the population. The leadership of the movement is composed of socialist academics, such as Thompson; church leaders, such as Monsignor Bruce Kent; Labour activists, such as Tony Benn; and union leaders, such as Arthur Scargill, the Communist leader of the coal miners. The composition of the CND's leadership, then, is the same as the power-base of the left in the Labour Party. Active rank-and-file CND members, who are willing to contribute funds and time, are generally idealistic, college-educated Labour supporters, many of whom have been unable to find white collar employment in Britain's troubled economic base. Most of the marchers, however, come from the increasingly alienated, unemployed, and unskilled youth of Britain. To attract larger crowds of disenchanted youth, many CND demonstrations, for example, usually take place in conjunction with "Jobs Fairs" and rock concerts.

To date, the CND has enjoyed several successes, the most important of which have been its ability to inject disarmament concerns into ongoing political debates and its role in increasing public concern over current British and NATO nuclear policy. In a February 1983 poll, for example, defense policy topped such traditional concerns as the condition of social services,<sup>21</sup> a truly dramatic change from similar polls since World War II, where defense was rarely a topic of great electoral concern. The growing debate over Trident II and cruise missiles has also forced the British government to address the peace movement in its pronouncements on nuclear policy, such as stressing the arms control aspect of the 1979 dual track decision in recent Defence White Papers. The support of the Labour Party has also expanded the scope of CND's activities; the government, for example, was forced to cancel a planned civil defense exercise in 1982 because of the failure of local Labour councils to cooperate.

The CND still has limited power and is faced with many problems. First, it is almost completely dependent for the implementation of its policies upon continued Labour support for unilateralism. A shift in party policy on this issue would leave the CND without a legitimizing political power base in the system. Second, the CND has limited

<sup>20</sup>*The Times*, 7 June 1982.

<sup>21</sup>*The Guardian*, 7 February 1983.

funding—estimated at some \$600,000 in 1982<sup>22</sup>—which has constrained the scope of its activities. Third, as in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the CND has attracted many diverse fringe elements, including the various Marxist and Trotskyite parties. At the November 1982 CND annual conference, for example, there were more than 30 groups in Britain aligned with the CND, ranging from Quakers and communists to Militant Vegetarians For Peace.<sup>23</sup> This diversity has led to serious internal tension between the moderates and those “CNDers” calling for massive strikes, sabotage of nuclear plans, civil disobedience, and other “direct action.” As one radical CND member camped out in front of a planned cruise missile base stated: “We believe in direct action and there will be more to come. Call it provocative if you will.”<sup>24</sup> At the annual conference the radical factions succeeded in passing a resolution calling for “direct action” when American cruise missiles are actually deployed in Britain in late 1983. The CND’s leadership has attempted to accommodate these radical moves by holding seminars on the legality of “direct action” and the uses of nonviolent protest,<sup>25</sup> but as we move closer to cruise missile deployments in Britain, these tensions and divisions within the CND are bound to increase.

The defeat of the Labour Party in June 1983 may have important implications for the CND, which must now attempt to maintain its momentum over a period of four to five years of Tory rule during which it has little chance of seeing its policies enacted. The CND’s leadership, acutely aware of the movement’s decline after similar problems in the early 1960s, has attempted to stress that adopting a non-nuclear defense policy will take a considerable period of time and that tactical defeats, such as the 1983 elections and even the possible installation of cruise missiles, should not be regarded as strategic defeats for the movement’s overall campaign. CND members have been encouraged to continue their pamphleting and participation in anti-nuclear demonstrations to keep nuclear issues in the public eye. Further, the CND’s leadership has recognized that to become a serious force and gain greater public support, it must place less stress on emotional reactions to the effects of nuclear weapons and greater stress on realistic alternatives for a nonnuclear Britain. Accordingly, the CND actively participated in the drafting of the recent report of the Alternative Defence Commission, a group of private citizens who attempted to examine defense policy options that do not rely on the threat of

<sup>22</sup>Minion and Bolsover, *The CND Story*, p. 39.

<sup>23</sup>See *The Times*, 26 November 1982.

<sup>24</sup>*The Guardian*, 15 July 1982.

<sup>25</sup>See, for example, *Campaign Atom: Oxford CND Bulletin*, July 1983, p. 6.

nuclear weapons. The report provides a more rational discussion of defense policy alternatives than much of CND's propaganda and hence enables the CND to engage in more sophisticated criticism of current decisions and offer alternatives. The commission concluded that Britain should disband its nuclear forces, encourage NATO to discontinue reliance on nuclear weapons (and should this fail, withdraw from NATO), and have its Western European allies adopt a conventional defense, in-depth strategy.<sup>26</sup>

The CND has little actual power regarding nuclear policy in Britain's closed policymaking system and is facing many of the same problems that led to its demise in the early 1960s—internal fragmentation, limited public support, and declining momentum. Nonetheless, their current position is distinguished from that in the early 1960s by two major differences: First, the organization has learned from its past mistakes and is attempting to avoid these errors; second, the left wing of the Labour Party is in a far stronger position than it was in previous decades, and the CND may enjoy the support of this influential party for some time to come.

## THE MEDIA

Although television, the press, and radio play a large and independent role in the U.S. defense and nuclear policymaking process, this is not generally the case in Great Britain. To be sure, the British media in some ways do play an indirect role, for the prestige journals—*The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Observer*—and the BBC and ITV occasionally offer editorial commentary on official nuclear policies. Informed dissent to government defense policy also sporadically appears in the "Letters" column in *The Times*, the traditional forum for presenting alternative views in elite circles. Also, the media occasionally do direct some public attention to the dissident views of such groups as the CND. And the media's reporting does help shape the overall environment within which defense and nuclear policies are formulated and carried out. However, in Britain the media typically play the role of transmitting government defense policy to opinion leaders and the general public. It is rare, except for the left-wing *Guardian*, *The New Statesman*, and the TV show "Panorama," that the media try to influence policy by uncovering controversial new information or exercising an independent voice on

<sup>26</sup>For more details, see Alternative Defence Commission, *Defence Without the Bomb*, International Publications Services, New York, 1983.

defense and nuclear policy matters. There are infrequent occasions when this happens, as concerning the decision to go ahead with the procurement of the expensive Trident system in a time of severe recession. But this is very much the exception, and the media's largely "transmission belt" role regarding nuclear policy issues is not likely to change in the foreseeable future.

There are two reasons for this situation. First, the media have very limited access to the kinds of detailed technical information needed for a direct input into the defense and nuclear policymaking process. Extremely tight secrecy pervades the British nuclear policymaking process.<sup>27</sup> In addition, in accordance with British law, governments commonly refuse defense and nuclear policy-related information to members of the House of Commons on the grounds that the information in question concerns national security and privileged communications either from foreign governments or from advisors within the executive, whose advice is guaranteed confidentiality. The silence imposed on the British civil service in exchange for this protection is formally reinforced by the 1911 Official Secrets Act, which also makes it a criminal offense for a government official to disclose any information obtained in the course of his employment, whether secret or not, to unauthorized persons. It is also an offense for anyone, including journalists, unlawfully given such information to publish it or communicate it to anyone else. Further, it is an offense for anyone having been formally entrusted with such information in confidence to disclose it under any but authorized circumstances. The possibilities for criminal prosecution under this legislation are enormous: Two journalists from *Private Eye* have been prosecuted for their foreign reporting.

There is no doubt that this legislation has had a chilling effect on the media's ability and inclination to comment on nuclear policy issues.<sup>28</sup> The Official Secrets Act is reinforced by the system of D-notices, addressed to editors asking them not to discuss specified areas of defense policy. These notices, first promulgated in 1912, and long an official secret, are issued by the "Defense, Press and Broadcasting Committee," composed of civil servants concerned with defense matters and specified journalists. Although these notices are voluntary and have no binding legal authority, they are frequently used successfully to discourage the British media from reporting military items.

<sup>27</sup>See Sec. II.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas Franck and Edward Weisband, "Disselement, Secrecy, and Executive Privilege in the Foreign Relations of Three Democracies: A Comparative Analysis," in Franck and Weisband, *Secrecy and Foreign Policy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1974, pp. 433-438.



Coincident with this tight official secrecy is the absence of many informed, outside experts on nuclear matters that have regular and direct input into the nuclear policymaking process. To be sure, there is a handful of knowledgeable defense scholars in Britain—Lawrence Freedman, David Greenwood, Michael Howard, Laurence Martin, Lord Zuckerman, and others—but their number is quite small and their influence typically depends on specific circumstances and personal friendships. Systematic contributions to intra-governmental debates by outside defense experts are rare.

This is illustrated by the limited role of “think tanks” in defense policymaking. The British government does help maintain two: the National Institute of Economic and Social Resources and the Political and Economic Planning Group. But these institutions principally concentrate on domestic economic issues. There also are the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Chatham House, and the Royal United Services Institute, which periodically publish defense policy studies; but these prestigious think tanks do not have regular access to classified material or direct input into, or often even knowledge of, governmental policy deliberations on nuclear matters. Admittedly, all three institutes have served at times as useful informal meeting places for civil servants and nongovernment analysts, including media representatives and defense intellectuals from Britain and other countries. This has been particularly true during Tory administrations because Conservative governments have been fairly open about defense matters, and Labour governments have typically tried to minimize public discussion of nuclear issues. However, the overall role that British think tanks have played in the defense and nuclear policy process has been completely different in Britain than in the United States—in terms of both affecting government policy and providing the media and the public with different perspectives on nuclear policy issues. In short, think tanks occasionally have had some effect, usually through the personal relationships of an individual. But they are not, as institutions, important factors in governmental deliberations on nuclear issues.

A second major reason why the media in Britain tend not to exercise much influence on the nuclear policymaking process relates to the role perception of media representatives themselves. Unlike the situation in the United States and several other Western democratic nations, the media in Britain typically perceive their role as being a conduit for the transmission of information from the government to the British people. This contrasts with the American media’s self-image as an independent source of information about what the government is doing or planning to do, an active participant in the government’s policy deliberations,

and a conduit for dissident opinions among executive branch officials. The self-perception of the British media coincides with what the British elites and public seem to want in their defense reporting. It results in a considerable amount of self-censure and self-restraint on the part of the media; the bland, predictable reporting on the government-owned BBC underscores this fact. It also reinforces the independent media's dependence on the government for information, generally gained from official press releases.

There are the so-called "Westminster lobby correspondents" who, under strict standards of confidentiality, are periodically given private briefings or leaks of information by executive branch officials. This "lobby" system is institutionalized, regulated by a written set of rules. If the correspondents and their editors choose to publish the information at all, it is done selectively and on a not-for-attribution basis. This does allow some information to reach the public that would otherwise remain secret. But the system of selectively briefing "lobby" correspondents is so carefully controlled that very little new official information reaches the public through this channel. And, of course, those correspondents who most carefully report information following a privileged briefing are the media representatives who are given such briefings in the future.

Naturally, some information leaks beyond the briefings of "Westminster lobby correspondents." Here, though, there is a distinction, in the words of former Foreign Minister Patrick Gordon Walker, between "ordinary leaks" and the disclosure of "state secrets," such as information pertaining to "military and security matters." In essence, ordinary leaks on general foreign policy issues are viewed as tolerable within the system, but leaks concerning national security information—such as on nuclear policy—are strictly forbidden.<sup>29</sup>

During and immediately after the Falklands War, there was some complaint from the media and the public about the government's management of the news.<sup>30</sup> In the course of a subsequent parliamentary inquiry, British officials in fact admitted misleading the media about British intentions and deployments during the fighting. However, predictably, nothing happened following this inquiry. One dissident journalist, Charles Winter, writing in *The Observer*, bitterly observed that as a result of the parliamentary inquiry following the Falklands War:

<sup>29</sup>"Secrecy and Openness in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking: A British Cabinet Perspective," in Franck and Weisband, *Secrecy and Foreign Policy*, pp. 46–49.

<sup>30</sup>See Robert Harris, *Gotcha! The Media, the Government and the Falklands Crisis*, Faber and Faber, London, 1983.

The hidden attitudes of many people in authority toward the media have been exposed. They think the public should be told as little as possible. They don't object to deception on matters both large and small. They dislike reporters. And they prefer that ruling circles should be left to run the state without being bothered by troublesome disclosures and unpleasant truths. . . . In fact some of them don't really care much for democracy either.<sup>31</sup>

Winter's comments are somewhat overstated. It is true that the media in Britain are likely to continue to act largely as a transmitter of government information and a general shaper of the overall environment, not a questioner, investigator, or influencer of policy. And this role is willingly supported by most of the media, opinion elites, and the public in Britain, especially regarding defense and nuclear matters. For the factors inducing secrecy and confidentiality in the national security area are far more pervasive in the British system and in British society than any inducing openness. This has been the case in Britain for a very long time, and neither the government nor the media seem inclined in the foreseeable future to change it. Although the media are likely to affect general public moods on nuclear policy issues, they are unlikely to play much of a role in shaping official or public attitudes.

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<sup>31</sup>This is quoted in Leonard Downie, Jr., "How Britain Managed the News," *The Washington Post*, 20 August 1982, p. A-15.

## V. BRITISH NUCLEAR POLICY AND THE UNITED STATES

British nuclear policy has evolved in a unique way, in an atmosphere much different from that in the United States, for example. Because of extremely tight secrecy within the government, the all-powerful role of the civil service, the two-party adversary relationship, and the very limited power of Parliament, the media, labor unions, and the CND, the British government's executive branch has played a dominant role on nuclear policy issues. It has been able to make many critical decisions without the significant involvement or interference of the opposition parties or public opinion in general. The infrequent dissension over nuclear affairs within the generally cohesive executive branch has been due less to differences on doctrine and more to resource allocation decisions concerning nuclear and conventional forces. These periodic frictions have been exacerbated because Britain's economy, except for a brief period in the 1960s, has been the only Western economy to experience a steady decline in real terms during most of the postwar years. And it shows little sign of recovering in the near future.

Although interest groups and the media have affected British nuclear policy at the margins, the Conservative and Labour Parties have set the general backdrop within which policymaking on nuclear issues has taken place during the past four decades. The Conservative Party's approach to nuclear issues has been shaped by an emotional attachment to the "imperial hangover" and a belief in the international influence generated by Britain's nuclear forces. The Tory Parliamentary Party has enjoyed a strong policymaking role because of the weakness of its wider support base; all Conservative administrations have devoted keen attention to the wishes of Tory MPs, who control the election of the party leader. Conservative dissension over nuclear policy issues has generally mirrored that within the executive branch; it has flowed largely from differences concerning budget allocation decisions, not nuclear policy positions.

Labour's often shifting nuclear policy has reflected deep internal schisms in the party on many issues and has been worsened by the divided party policymaking process, with the left frequently using nuclear issues to discredit the right. Recent structural changes have increased the power of the left and, combined with growing concern about British nuclear policies and American-Soviet relations, have led

to the current Labour policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Power in the Labour Party ultimately depends upon the attitudes of the unions, which provide 90 percent of the party's funds and, if united, control the all-important party conference. Until recently, the unions have generally sided with the more pragmatic right wing of Labour, but a leftward shift in the leadership of many unions has enabled the left in the party to push successfully for a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Although the two political parties have set the general backdrop for nuclear policymaking in Britain, the United States has directly affected British nuclear policy. Nuclear affairs, after all, have been a key strand in the web of cultural, linguistic, political, and strategic ties that have formed the so-called "special relationship" between the United States and Britain. The Anglo-American relationship emerged from the crucible of World War II to reach an unusually high degree of intimacy in the 1950s (even overcoming such setbacks as Suez) but has since alternately faded and bloomed. Disagreements over Vietnam and the British withdrawal from "East of Suez" in the early 1970s led to a cooling of relations, although the current Tory government has moved to rekindle warm relations. Nevertheless, Britain's entry into the European Economic Community in 1972 underscored Britain's potential new role as a Eurocentric power, and Britain has recently found itself supporting European positions against the United States, as illustrated in the U.S.-European disputes over the Soviet gas pipeline and steel and agricultural exports.

Still, there is no question that the Anglo-American relationship has been highly unusual. Never before in history have two nations maintained such close and intimate ties in such sensitive areas as intelligence gathering and security policy. As Henry Kissinger noted after revealing that a British civil servant had helped draft American nuclear arms control proposals during Soviet-American negotiations in 1972: "There was no government which we would have dealt with so openly, exchanged ideas so freely, or in effect permitted to participate in our own deliberations."<sup>1</sup>

Anglo-American nuclear cooperation has in fact been among the most unusual aspects of the network of bilateral ties. The emergence of the United States as the preeminent world power at the close of World War II strongly fueled British desires to acquire and maintain a nuclear capability so as to exert influence over U.S. security policy. Since 1947, when the Labour government reluctantly concluded that

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<sup>1</sup>H. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Little, Brown, & Co., Boston, 1982, p. 282.

the Soviet Union would remain the dominant threat to British security, Britain has sought to enmesh the United States in the defense of Western Europe. This, of course, reflected a recognition that American nuclear policy directly affected British security. As Winston Churchill once noted: "There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them."

The British have always been uncomfortable with entrusting their security to the United States. Nuclear weapons were seen as one means to ensure that British interests received adequate consideration in Washington and NATO discussions. At the same time, the United States has profoundly influenced British nuclear policy through the transfer of nuclear data and components of nuclear weapons systems. To recount briefly, the United States has provided Britain with data on nuclear weapon design and reactor systems for nuclear submarines,<sup>2</sup> has regularly tested British missiles and nuclear devices, and has sold (or agreed to sell) advanced strategic systems and supporting equipment to Britain.

This web of nuclear cooperation has enabled Britain to maintain a credible nuclear capability at a greatly reduced cost, particularly in regard to strategic nuclear systems. This in turn has enabled Britain to spend a greater percentage of her defense budget on conventional weaponry. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, Britain spent only some 2 to 5 percent of its defense budget on nuclear systems, compared with France's 20 percent.

This cooperation has also left Britain almost completely dependent for the acquisition of its strategic systems upon the vagaries of the American procurement process, which at times has led to dramatic shifts in Britain's nuclear force posture. To be sure, changes in British nuclear forces have been driven to a great extent by improvements in Soviet capabilities. The British Bomber Command's adoption of a quick reaction alert status in the late 1950s and the cancellation of the Blue Streak IRBM in 1960, for example, were caused largely by recognition of the vulnerability of these systems to a Soviet preemptive strike. The Chevaline program also reflected British fears of a possible improvement in Soviet ABM capability.

Yet changes in American policy have also exerted a powerful influence on the development of British nuclear forces. The U.S. cancellation of Skybolt, for example, directly led to the decision to procure Polaris and moved Britain away from a bomber-based deterrent to a less vulnerable submarine-based one. The astronomically increased

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<sup>2</sup>J. Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations, 1939-1980*, pp. 54-59.

costs of the F-111 (slated to replace the canceled TSR-2 strike bomber) forced the British government to cancel orders for the American aircraft, leaving Britain with a largely obsolete force of nuclear-capable deep strike interdiction aircraft until the entry of the Tornado into RAF squadrons. Further, the U.S. decision to speed up the procurement of Trident II led the British to change their initial decision to buy Trident I. If the Trident II program is carried out, it will provide the British with an increased number of warheads that have greatly improved accuracy. In which ways these new capabilities will affect British targeting plans remains uncertain.

How will all of these factors, as well as internal actors and pressures in the United Kingdom, affect future British attitudes toward changes in NATO's nuclear employment doctrine and force structure? The present political situation in Britain complicates the course of American policy considerably. Britain is at present more polarized in regard to nuclear policy than ever. The two dominant political parties have adopted strongly conflicting policies on the future of the British nuclear forces and the basing of American nuclear systems in Britain. Labour wishes to cancel Trident and GLCM deployments and eject current American nuclear systems from British soil; the Conservatives are committed to the opposite course. The SDP/Liberal alliance has added to the clamor by offering other options ranging from unilateral nuclear disarmament to placing a dual key system on the proposed cruise missile force. And recent polls indicate growing public dissatisfaction with the current course of the Conservatives. Although some 72 percent of those asked support the maintenance of British nuclear forces, 56 percent are against the procurement of Trident II and 61 percent are against the deployment of U.S. cruise missiles in Britain.<sup>3</sup>

Most British politicians (with the exception of the left wing of Labour), civil servants, and military officers regard America's commitment to the defense of Western Europe as the utter cornerstone of their security. In the past, the British have often bent or moderated their policies to accommodate American interests and thus ensure continued American support. They will probably continue to do so.

This willingness to accommodate the United States is widely seen as being in British interests in the broadest sense. Still, any changes in Alliance doctrine must be careful *not* to go so far as to threaten British nuclear independence, unless of course a future Labour administration actively pursues a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament. The ultimate purpose of the British independent force is to deter a Soviet

<sup>3</sup>Figures drawn from *Sunday Times* poll, 23 January 1983.

nuclear attack on the British Isles, which are extremely vulnerable to even a limited strike. The pragmatic British have sometimes questioned the credibility of the American nuclear guarantee and, as the Trident II decision illustrates, are willing to sacrifice to maintain a credible second-strike capability. Although continuing to depend on certain American nuclear technologies for the foreseeable future, few British governments will look kindly on American attempts to undermine this capability or Britain's sense of nuclear independence.

Regardless of which party is in office, Britain will probably react negatively to concerted American efforts to affect the allocation of British defense resources. Parochial service interests and the pressures of a declining economic base have frequently combined to help shape Britain's sometimes unilateral defense policy. Resource allocation decisions typically are highly politically charged issues that reflect years of intra-executive bickering and friction. American suggestions on better uses of British resources are unappreciated and just as often ignored. As one senior Pentagon official summarily observed: "I have come to realize that no matter how firmly convinced *you* are about how to spend *their* money, the British seem to spend it on things *they* think are the most important."<sup>4</sup>

American policymakers should keep in mind that Britain will be more likely to accept changes in the Alliance's nuclear employment doctrine provided they do not involve actual moves toward war-fighting as opposed to political signalling, hamper Britain's sense of nuclear independence, or entail the expenditure of substantial new British funds. In the MLF debate, for example, British resistance was driven in part by suspicions that the United States was attempting to undermine British independence and in part by the considerable additional expenditure that the new force would incur. Further, the British counterproposal—the Atlantic Nuclear Force—had strong appeal in part because it was composed of already budgeted national systems combined with some very modestly priced multilateral manned systems. Indeed, the British response in the MLF case was classic; it was an attempt to accommodate the United States, but it did not involve the expenditure of additional Exchequer funds or limit British independence.

This being said about nuclear forces, the United States can generally count on Britain's continued support for the expenditure of additional revenues on conventional forces should they be convincingly shown to be necessary to improve the Alliance's deterrent posture. Britain has

<sup>4</sup>Cited in *Armed Forces Journal International*, September 1980, p. 21.



now largely accepted the need for strong conventional forces for the defense of Western Europe and since 1979 has moved to increase defense spending largely along the terms of the 1978 NATO Long Term Defense Plan. The services strongly support conventional expenditures and the Tories are especially sensitive to service pressure. A Labour administration would be less likely to support large conventional force improvements, given the party's commitment to reducing defense expenditures. But Labour could be expected to support some conventional force modernization, particularly because an emphasis on conventional weaponry would probably reduce the focus on nuclear systems.

Finally, the existing relationship between the United States and Britain is in many ways one of mutual dependence. Britain relies upon the United States to counterbalance Soviet influence in Europe and for important components of her strategic nuclear forces. The United States is politically and militarily dependent upon Britain. A serious rift in Anglo-American relations, caused either by disagreements over nuclear policy issues or other disputes, would be a serious blow to American and NATO security. British participation in NATO is vital for the defense of Europe, particularly in regard to the basing of GLCMs and the rearward basing of American tactical airpower and communication facilities, as well as existing plans to rush American reinforcements to Europe.<sup>5</sup> In short, there is truly a mutual dependence as well as a mutuality of interest. We should keep this in mind, along with British interests and sensitivities, as we shape future policies on nuclear employment and doctrine issues.

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<sup>5</sup>Furthermore, the United States leases British bases at Ascension and Diego Garcia. The latter has assumed even greater importance as the United States has devoted greater attention and resources to developing a military capability to defend the Persian Gulf from internal and external threats. The British are strongly aware of this and will undoubtedly use it to further their interests.

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